

HERMENEUTICS AND PHENOMENOLOGY OF RECEPTION

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CLOV: What is there to keep me here?
HAMM: The dialogue.

--SAMUEL BECKETT, Endgame

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The proliferation of critical theories during the last few decades has caused many teachers to wonder how best to introduce students to literature while also teaching them the aesthetic and historical background which makes meaningful interpretation possible. It seems that an interpretive approach is needed which capitalizes on basic presuppositions regarding literary works, but which can also facilitate modification and enlargement of those presuppositions, thus leading the student interpreter toward more complete understanding of the work and his or her relationship to it. The most useful methodologies for the realization of this hermeneutic objective seem to be phenomenology and reader-response criticism, both of which adapt the dialogical model of hermeneutics to the pursuit of intersubjective, humanistic interpretations. A synthesis of these methodologies, modeled on Hans Robert Jauss's aesthetic of reception, provides an interpretive approach which is useful for students who are approaching literature systematically for the first time. Such an approach should be

valid with virtually any literary work, of any genre, from any period, and so the works chosen for illustration--The Canterbury Tales, Hamlet, and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man--represent generic and historical diversity. The interpretive approach, consisting of three stages of reading which correspond to the hermeneutic moments of understanding, interpretation, and application, yields readings of these texts which are complex, initially ambiguous, but finally rich in humanistic and aesthetic affirmation. Presuming that teachers endeavor to imbue their students with such affirmation, and that students approach literature with complementary presuppositions, such results justify the methodology and presuppositions that precede them.

INTRODUCTION

Reading literature can be an insufferably frustrating experience to many students; writing about literature can be absolutely maddening. Consequently, teaching literature and how to write about it presents several challenges to professors of English. First, and perhaps most important, students need to overcome their feelings of alienation from the literary work. They need to learn that no matter how far removed, temporally or culturally, that work seems to be from their experience, something immediate in the act of reading can erase the apparent boundaries separating them from the work. Second, students need to acquire various mechanical and analytical skills, such as recognition of rhetorical devices and structural elements, for interpreting literary works. Finally, and perhaps most problematic, they need to learn some method of critical response which enables them to view literature as something more than a cultural artifact. In short, they need to learn how to experience literature as part of the cultural tradition to which they belong, and the teacher's responsibility is to increase the chance that what Wayne Booth calls "critical understanding" will replace, "on the one hand, sentimental and uncritical identifications that leave minds undisturbed and, on the other, hypercritical negations that freeze or alienate."¹

Of course, the molding process is most apparent in graduate seminars; undergraduates, especially freshmen encountering literature systematically for the first time, are generally taught dictatorially--

they must swallow the teacher's critical position (if the teacher has a position) whole or be forever alienated, precisely because so many of them lack the intuition or the historical sense to see the study of literature as a continuation of a humanistic tradition which spans centuries. Can we teachers overcome such a deficiency? Can we channel the native intelligence and sensitivity of most of our students into some kind of positive response to what they read? We can if we do not doubt the importance of that moment of critical understanding which occurs when the student succeeds in entering another mind and extracting from it nourishment for his or her own. In order to promote this desired effect, we must have some coherent theory of critical response, some theory which describes and guides our attempts at enlarging and restructuring human experience through literature.

The plethora of critical theories currently available presents a formidable obstacle to many students and teachers of literature. The formerly insulated critical world has admitted many voices: formalist, existential, structuralist, deconstructive. Each voice attains popularity depending on the rhetorical skill of its proponents and the predisposition of its adherents. Yet despite this Babel of critical voices, most critics are engaged in pretty much the same activity--trying to understand literature, either as a genre or a particular work or author. They are, in effect, practicing hermeneutics in that they seek to understand. The Babel ensues because they are motivated by different presuppositions about what constitutes understanding and how it can be located. The ends are similar; only the means vary. My purpose is to formulate an approach to critical understanding which emphasizes the shared goal while distinguishing among some of the different

methodologies. I have elected to focus on an essentially homogeneous set of philosophical and critical strategies--hermeneutics, phenomenology, and reader-response criticism. My choice is determined largely by my theoretical presupposition--that literary criticism is an essentially humanistic endeavor--and by certain marked congruencies among these strategies which increase the probability of critical understanding for the student using them. I do not suggest that any strategy by itself is sufficient; rather, synthesizing these strategies to supplement one another yields the best results. Nor do I claim that a synthesis yields the one "true" approach; instead, the synthesis capitalizes on the innate interests of a reader in producing a viable approach.

My organizational strategy can best be described as bipartite: theory and praxis. The first part is composed of four chapters, the first three of which metacritically discuss and analyze the chosen strategies, as well as present some history of each and highlight their congruencies. The first chapter deals with the hermeneutic enterprise. While not, strictly speaking, a critical strategy, hermeneutics does serve to identify the goal of most criticism--understanding a work's meaning. I have chosen to present this discussion by highlighting the opposition between objective and subjective hermeneutics, whose chief proponents are E. D. Hirsch on the one hand, and Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer on the other. I also introduce Hans Robert Jauss, whose project for reviving literary hermeneutics through an aesthetics of reception attempts to reconcile the objective and subjective practitioners. Heidegger and Gadamer are influenced by phenomenology, and that connection serves as a transition to the second chapter. This chapter on phenomenology reviews the major thinkers who have contributed to our

current understanding of that term and examines the split between the Geneva School "critics of consciousness" and the phenomenological ontologists. In this chapter I have addressed the concern of phenomenologists for the contribution of the individual reader to the hermeneutic enterprise, and this emphasis leads logically to the third chapter, on reader-response criticism. In this chapter I examine the consonance between phenomenology and reader-response criticism, especially as it is formulated by Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, and Hans Robert Jauss. I also consider the importance of individual historical consciousness in their theories, and so I include an analysis of Gadamer's view of historical consciousness and its revision and mediation through Jauss's aesthetic of reception.

At this point I want to anticipate two objections that might be made regarding this project thus far. First, I acknowledge that this metacritical section is largely derivative; I have been guided chiefly by the work of Richard Palmer, David Hoy, Robert Magliola, and Frank Lentricchia. I have tried to limit my reliance on these commentators to the historical overviews in the various chapters; where their influence enters in other sections I have been guided by their fluent interpretations of critical works not translated into English. And because this part is metacritical, I have tried scrupulously to represent limitations in their interpretations. Second, I have chosen to ignore an extremely fecund line of critical theory by omitting any discussion of structuralism and poststructuralism. My reason for doing so is that I perceive the underlying presuppositions of these theories to be inconsistent with the humanistic goal of criticism as I have articulated it. Whereas phenomenology sees works as constructs of a human consciousness that

display a world, structuralism construes works as logical models that attempt to resolve contradictions between binary oppositions.² And poststructuralism, despite its playful attitude, sees works as devoid of any criteria for judging any interpretation as "correct." As I hope to demonstrate, understanding cannot occur without presuppositions about human being, the being of the object interrogated, and the being of the world as a whole. I perceive the presuppositions of phenomenology to be more congruous than those of poststructuralism with literary criticism as a fundamentally humanistic and heuristic undertaking.

The fourth chapter in this theoretical part functions as a bridge to the application chapters. In it I review the congruent characteristics in traditional and revisionist hermeneutics, phenomenology, and reader-response criticism. I also posit a hypothetical, "ideal" reader for the subsequent readings, one who combines the qualities of curiosity and precision, and who is capable of being misled and surprised. In short, this "ideal" reader may be characterized as a composite of the teacher and the student, examining the effects of the text on his or her opinion, and willing to revise that opinion upon receipt of further information. I next outline a method of critical response which synthesizes the congruent features which I have identified, and which is derived, with modifications, from Jauss's treatment of the threefold hermeneutic process of understanding, interpretation, and application; these three activities are carried out during three successive stages of reading. In outlining this method of critical response, I reveal the usefulness of such disparate strategies as defamiliarization, phenomenological analysis, and the recognition of indeterminacy in approaching a literary work. Finally, I again stress that this method is not offered as a solution to pluralism

in interpretation, but as a validation of that pluralism which nevertheless abides by certain innate constraints.

My application commences in the second part, and at this stage I cease to be derivative, largely because few phenomenological or reader-response analyses exist for the works that I consider. In the fifth chapter I examine Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, particularly its use of irony as a means for destabilizing the reader's initial response and as a means for leading the reader to a more active role in actualizing the work's meaning. I also examine the historical nature of this destabilization and subsequent actualization in terms of its significance to the modern reader. In the sixth chapter I bring Hamlet to the foreground; from this vantage point I examine how its use of the aesthetic metaphor leads the reader into a world of ambiguity which can best be resolved through the methodology outlined in Chapter 4. Finally, in the seventh chapter I turn to Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, paying particular attention to the alterations in tone and diction which reflect the protagonist's changing perception of language and how that alteration guides the reader's perception of the work's narrative structure. In summary, I present the reflexive devices of irony, aesthetic metaphor, and narrative shifts as the modes through which a response to these works can be induced in the reader. I do not suggest that these readings are definitive or in any ultimate sense "right." However, among a plurality of equally "correct" readings these can be seen as coherent in methodology and consistent with their presupposition. And I believe that such an approach is the most useful tool we can bequeath to our students.

Finally, we need to consider several terms which will occur frequently in the succeeding pages. Some of them undergo metamorphoses

when used by different critics, so we need to establish some boundaries. When I refer to interpretation, I do so in the broad sense, as explaining a work's meaning to a reader. This activity is the goal of criticism, a term I also use in the broad sense, as the explication and analysis of literary texts, rather than in the narrow sense of evaluation. The term meaning is a good deal more problematic, and we will consider it more fully in the first chapter. Generally I will use the term to denote a work's connection with something outside itself such as the reader or the reader's world. The meaning of a work is derived from our understanding a work, and here I use the term in its gnostic sense, an intuitive recognition. I use the terms work and text interchangeably and do not imply a distinction between an aesthetically perceived object and a mere artifact. The term historical consciousness also is problematic, and I use this term as a neutral alternative to historicity and historicality. Historical consciousness generally refers to the reader's awareness of the work as bound to an historical matrix, its interpretation therefore being subject to an historically informed preunderstanding. Moreover, historical consciousness implies the reader's awareness of the distance separating current reception from earlier receptions. The sense of history which acts as a foundation for this historical consciousness is that outlined by Hegel: history is a continuous process of becoming, so no moment in history can be bracketed or treated as privileged. Indeed, the present must be seen simply as a temporary culmination of the still-evolving process. The term historicality, however, refers to the attempt to recover the matrix of the author and thus reproduce it, and the term historicity refers to the more recent tendency to identify the reader's historical matrix as the foreground for the work. These distinctions,

which play an important part in my discussion of reader-response criticism, may serve to prevent the kind of terminological confusion that frequently occurs in relation to the expression, radical historicism. For example, when Hirsch uses the term pejoratively he means an historical consciousness which does not attempt to recover the past because the practitioner believes, as do Heidegger and Gadamer, that the attempt is futile. However, when Fish uses the term he means an historical consciousness which does attempt to recover the past to some degree.³

Throughout this project I have been motivated by the desire to formulate a critical approach which is both philosophically sound and pedagogically useful, an approach which can be communicated to students who may lack the specialized historical or analytical apparatus for interpreting literature. The synthesis achieved through an examination of congruencies among hermeneutics, phenomenology, and reader-response criticism is in many ways descriptive. The most natural approach to interpreting a work of literature seems to be a consideration of its relevance to the reader's experience; most students approach literature in this fashion, at least initially. Yet often they are reminded to "stick to the text" so as not to wander into conjecture and personal opinion. As scholars and teachers, we need to validate that personal approach while showing that certain built-in textual constraints prevent interpretation from degenerating into solipsism. If we accomplish this validation, we may revive our students' flagging interest in literary studies. Moreover, if we renew interest in literary studies, we may assure the continuation of a humanistic tradition which has eroded from within and without through the bifurcation of composition and literature.

My contribution is modest, but I see it as part of an effort to prolong a tradition based on values that I esteem greatly and believe are worth preserving.

NOTES

¹ Wayne C. Booth, "Presidential Address 1982," PMLA, 98 (1983), 317-318.

² Paul B. Armstrong, "The Conflict of Interpretations and the Limits of Pluralism," PMLA, 98 (1983), 342.

³ Hirsch uses this term pejoratively in his Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Fish uses the term more ironically in his essay "Literature in the Reader," reprinted in Is There A Text in This Class? (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

CHAPTER 1
THE HERMENEUTIC ENTERPRISE

Background and History

The term "hermeneutics" has gained increasing prominence in Anglo-American theological, philosophical, and legal circles during the last two decades. Although the practice of hermeneutics is not new, especially in the areas of biblical and legal exegesis, hermeneutics in literary interpretation is a relatively new phenomenon which has arisen in response to a major dispute in literary theory. Paul Armstrong identifies this dispute as one which divides radical relativists "who argue that interpretation is limitless from [monists] who hold that textual meaning is singular and ultimately discoverable."¹ In their extreme forms, Armstrong argues, neither the nihilism of the radical relativists nor the absolutism of the monists is acceptable; "neither position can account for the paradox that characterizes the actual practice of our discipline: we have legitimate disagreements about what literary works mean, but we are also able to say that some readings are wrong, not simply different."² Our agreement is founded on our assumption that the work means something; our disagreement often is founded on our assumptions of what meaning is, or what the nature of the work is, or what our relation to the work is. Nevertheless, we are engaged in a hermeneutic enterprise, and we need to find a way of explaining the paradox Armstrong identifies and possibly dispelling it; we can begin this endeavor by considering the background and history of hermenutics as applied to literary criticism.

Hermeneutics is usually defined as the study of understanding, especially the understanding of texts. Etymologically the term derives from the Greek verb hermēneuein, translated as "to interpret, explain, make clear," and the noun hermēneia, "an interpretation, explanation." Secondary meanings of the Greek verb and noun are consistent but add a new dimension as well: hermēneuein also means "to express, give utterance," and hermēneia means "a sign." Inevitably, these words refer us to the messenger-god Hermes who, in his task of conveying messages of divine origin to human ears, is associated with the task of translating what is beyond human understanding into a form intelligible to humans. Eventually, the Greek conception splits into two branches: demystification and recovery of meaning. As Walter Kendrick observes, "The Delphic oracle was hard to interpret because gods don't speak man's language, but the aim was to understand godsspeak in contemporary, practical terms." On the other hand, "Homer was hard because human language changes; the aim of Homeric commentary was to let contemporary Greeks understand what their archaic precursor had meant in his own terms."³ Currently, the words "hermeneutics" and "hermeneutical" suggest the process of bringing to understanding, particularly through language, since language is the most accessible medium for the process.⁴

The implication of these origins is clear for contemporary teaching and scholarship; we need a methodology appropriate to deciphering the human imprint on a work as well as to facilitating the supplementation of the student's experience with that of the text. As a modern Hermes, the interpreter must find the most effective means for transmitting the message to an expectant audience. The task should be simple, it would seem, as the source of the message is not divine, and the medium is

common to both author and audience. However, language changes, as Kendrick observes, and differing interpretations can occur. Differentiation can be understood, though, if our methodology is sufficiently flexible and comprehensive. One such methodology is founded on the first premise of hermeneutics, that interpretation is basically circular. The classic formulation of the hermeneutic circle holds that we can comprehend the details of a work only if we project a sense of its entirety, just as we can comprehend the whole only if we understand its constituent parts. A broader view of the hermeneutic enterprise reveals its usefulness in giving a philosophical interpretation of human existence. Since philosophy is one aspect of human existence, the philosophical interpretation must account for its own possibility. But hermeneutics can also give a literary interpretation of a text (also an aspect of human existence), so literary interpretation must also account for itself. In other words, one can understand human existence by grasping its constituent parts, such as philosophy and literature. However, one must first understand human existence before grasping its constituent parts.

An underlying assumption of this concept is that interpretation requires acts of faith. As Armstrong suggests, we must have "beliefs that compose parts into a whole, hypotheses that we check, modify, and refine by moving back and forth between aspects of any state of affairs and our sense of its overall configuration."⁵ As a result of this version of the hermeneutic circle, certain difficulties arise regarding the validity of an interpretation or even the way in which we understand the term meaning. Because interpretation requires guesswork, there are no rules which will guarantee a successful hypothesis. For that matter, no theory of interpretation is an infallible mechanism for producing

meanings which are consistent. Consequently, no theory guarantees effective readings every time; any method can lead to more or less convincing interpretations. These are the facts in practice; in theory, some monist critics suggest that this state of affairs is due to an imprecise understanding of meaning as the goal of interpretation. The conflict in modes of interpretation suggests an opposition between objective and subjective modes. We may align the opposing camps as follows: the monists, who view themselves as the upholders of the classical hermeneutic tradition and argue that interpretation should be objective, based on independent facts in the text; and the relativists, who argue that interpretation is indefinitely variable, since the interpreter is historically and psychologically distanced from the text.⁶ This opposition is anticipated in the hermeneutic theories of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, whose works originate in the nineteenth-century German scholastic tradition. Although monists might claim sponsorship by both these thinkers, I believe that a review of their theories will reveal the seeds of relativism in Dilthey's work.

Schleiermacher endeavored to found a "general hermeneutics" which would form the basis of Geisteswissenschaften, sciences of the mind or spirit. He conceived of hermeneutics as the art of understanding, and he attempted to systematize the process in Hermeneutik und Kritik (1838).⁷ He assumed an essential unity in the literary work, in that the idea behind the work interacts with grammar to create meaning; in other words, the author's intended mental idea is suitably expressed by the grammatical form. From this basic assumption he evolved a general hermeneutic theory based on a grammatical, objective dimension and a stylistic, subjective dimension. He later moved toward a

psychologically centered hermeneutics, one in which the goal was a psychological reconstruction of the author's meaning. We might be justified in wondering how psychological reconstruction can be objective since the reconstruction involves the author's historical and stylistic individualities. Apparently Schleiermacher intended this method of reconstruction to be construed as objective because it relies on a mediation of the author's mental processes by the objective grammatical units which provide a context for the mental processes. In other words, the grammatical system would somehow limit and constrain the stylistic variations the authors chose to use. Yet the object for Schleiermacher was to somehow transcend language in order to get at the inner process. The goal is not so much to assign motives or causes for feelings as to reconstruct thought itself.

An important feature of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics is his formulation of the relation between literature and human experience as a question and answer dialogue. In his view, the work represents the author, and the reader encounters it as another voice; their exchange of views enlarges that of the reader and provides for a fusion of horizons, a concept upon which Dilthey later dilates. This dialogical relation has also been adopted by practitioners of phenomenological criticism and reader-response criticism. However, Schleiermacher saw the dialogue in scientific terms and attempted to formalize it. Moreover, and crucial to the current hermeneutic dispute, he saw the interpretive problem as inseparable from the art of understanding; this relation of interpretation to understanding has fostered much disagreement over the nature and limits of criticism. Most particularly, his view of understanding as the art of reexperiencing the author's mental

processes pervades E. D. Hirsch's early identification of meaning with authorial intention in an historically fixed approach to hermeneutics.

The urge to systematize hermeneutics was carried further by Wilhelm Dilthey, a philosopher and literary historian who conceived of hermeneutics as the foundation for all humanistic studies, "all those disciplines which interpret expressions of man's inner life, whether the expressions be gestures, historical actions, codified law, art works, or literature."⁸ Dilthey appropriated Schleiermacher's belief that it is possible for one human being to transpose himself into the inner world of another through understanding--not by introspection but by reading him, studying his experiences. Still, Dilthey also sought objective, verifiable laws like those of natural science. His goal was to develop methods of obtaining objectively valid interpretations of the expressions of man's inner life by starting from concrete experience rather than from speculation. He operated on the fundamentally Hegelian premise that life is dynamic; consequently, understanding must take into account man's past, present, and future. Dilthey's hermeneutic problem is thus one of recovering an historical consciousness, a sense of the interpreter's position in historical time. This refinement on Schleiermacher's theory has become central to the theories of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Jauss. Historical consciousness, as Dilthey conceived of it, was necessary because it would regulate interpretation, a process that begins and ends with concrete, historical, lived experience. Dilthey formulated his hermeneutic procedure as a relation between experience, expression, and understanding.⁹

As defined by Dilthey, the lived experience (Erlebnis) is a unit held together by a common meaning. It occurs before perception separates subject and object, before the subject reflects on the object. For example, I may have a meaningful experience of a painting based on

several encounters separated by time and place, and this complex still constitutes a unified experience. The unity of meaning as an experience removes the encounters from the flow of life and holds them together. Moreover, the experience is the act of consciousness, not the content of reflexive consciousness in which one is aware of being a subject and having an experience of a certain object. The next phase, expression (Ausdruck), reflects the inner life of man. In expression one organizes experience into a coherent form; expression thus is an "objectification" of man's experience. Specifically, the art work as authorial expression points to life itself, rather than to the author, through the common medium of language. In the final phase, understanding (Verstehen), lived experience is comprehended. It is not a purely cognitive operation but a special moment when one life understands or grasps another. In understanding, the subject is united with the object after having been separated from it by expression. The object of this understanding, meaning, is necessarily contextual in that the interpreter views this operation from a given standpoint at a given time. For Dilthey, every act of understanding occurs in a given context, and the interpreter must find a viable manner of interaction between his context, or horizon, and that of the author.

Dilthey's principal significance for our investigation is his emphasis on historical consciousness; he elevated the sense of historical continuity to a central position in the hermeneutic enterprise. In a way, historical consciousness supplements the dialectic between experience and expression, for the resultant understanding takes account of past, present, and future. Understanding involves both recollection and anticipation in that the reader's consciousness of experience, or recollection, encounters the author's expression of lived experience so that the reader must anticipate the expression's meaning. Since recollection and anticipation are

temporal processes, they presuppose historical consciousness, even if the interpreter is not overtly aware of this connection. Thus the reader discovers historical continuity through interaction with the author's sense of historical continuity as expressed in a work. Consequently, man is dependent on continual interpretation of the past because history is a series of world views which are continually modified by succeeding events and views.

In summarizing the theories of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, we have also introduced some of the issues which have led to disagreement among current critics. Schleiermacher undeniably set forth a hermeneutic methodology directed at eliciting a determinate meaning, a meaning identical with that intended by the author. This hermeneutics of recovery informs Hirsch's version of the search for meaning as articulated in Validity in Interpretation (1967) and The Aims of Interpretation (1976). Dilthey in theory elaborates on Schleiermacher's methodology, but his focus on historical consciousness as a necessary factor in hermeneutics makes possible a degree of subjectivity in interpretation. In turn, this focus on historical consciousness provides an important ingredient for the revisionist hermeneutics of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Jauss, all of whom adhere to a hermeneutic approach that goes beyond the work in the search for meaning. As opposed to Hirsch's "objective" hermeneutics based on psychological and historical recovery of the author's intended meaning, the "subjective" hermeneutics of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Jauss treats the text as a speaker, not a mediating object through which the author's mental processes are refined and revealed.¹⁰ The text is a subject in itself with which the reader conducts a dialogue on lived experience. We must then speak of understanding the work, not its author. Such an approach does not

necessarily lead into the radical relativism which Armstrong sets against absolute monism; instead, such an approach provides for a constrained pluralism in interpretation founded on intersubjectivity between text and interpreter.

Revisionist Hermeneutics and
Conflict in Interpretation

The first hermeneutic theorist to diverge radically from the nineteenth-century tradition was Martin Heidegger. He expanded the systematic scope of hermeneutics, conceived by Schleiermacher and Dilthey as a foundation for the sciences of the mind and spirit, to encompass being in general. While he modified the views of both Schleiermacher and Dilthey, he was apparently more indebted to Dilthey for his perception of historical consciousness as a crucial factor in hermeneutics; he extrapolated from Dilthey's sense of the importance of historical consciousness the inherent temporality of the hermeneutic circle. Influenced by the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, Heidegger defined understanding as the fundamental mode of existence in the world and as the medium of ontological disclosure, or revelation of being. Moreover, he insisted that some context is necessary for understanding to occur; for him, access to a work is perspectival and partial. Such a position sounds subjectivist and solipsistic, and Heidegger tried to allay the fear of wild subjectivity in interpretation by insisting that anticipatory understandings which influence research and inquiry should not be based on fancies but should be developed in terms of the subjects of inquiry themselves.¹¹ Such aesthetic consciousness can lead to a revision of the ontological status of a work, for according to some hermeneutic accounts, the essential difference between ordinary and poetic texts lies in the reader's expectation of truth—one expects

a literary text to "mean" differently than a scientific text. This difference is founded on a characteristic which can also be found articulated in Russian formalist theory and Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory; as Heidegger expresses it, "the setting-into-work of truth thrusts up the unfamiliar and extraordinary and at the same time thrusts down the ordinary and what we believe to be such."¹² The criteria by which a work is judged, then, determine the kinds of questions one asks of it, and these in turn limit the number of possible interpretations which can be assigned to a work. This limitation is affected in part by preunderstanding.

In Heidegger's estimation, the meaning of objects lies in their relation to a structural whole; furthermore, their meaningfulness is deeper than language and is founded on anticipatory understanding. The importance of this preunderstanding is revealed in Heidegger's observation, "interpretation is never a presuppositionless grasping of something in advance."¹³ In a global sense, every interpretive approach has its own anticipatory understanding of a work, one that reflects basic presuppositions. Against the charge that such a procedure yields relativism, one would have to respond that Heidegger did not base his theory on an a priori distinction between subject and object. Instead, human reality, which includes the work and the reader, is integrated in the manner described by Dilthey under the rubric "experience." Moreover, human reality is "a storehouse of universal potentials of human being which become the basis for historical knowledge."¹⁴ Heidegger's point was that our preliminary sense of the whole gives us a particular set of expectations that then direct our attention and that the subsequent explication of details modifies

our original sense of the whole. The implication for criticism is that there is no meaning without preunderstanding, and that meaning is always to some degree predetermined.

The contemporary debate in critical theory is fueled largely by disagreement about meaning--where it resides, who or what determines it. The monists hold that a work has only one meaning, and that meaning can be objectively determined. Such is Hirsch's position, although he provides for an indefinite number of "significances" attributable to any work. Relativists, or pluralists as Wayne Booth prefers to call them, hold that a work can have several equally valid meanings, although their number is limited. In any event, the debate is difficult to ignore, a fact known well to any teacher who has tried to elicit explication or analysis from a student. Perhaps the issue is too metaphysical for general classroom use, but we must address it in the interest of constructing an interpretive model which validates interpretation founded on the experience, both social and literary, of the student, and which subsequently modifies that complex of experience.

In our science-oriented culture, objectivity is desirable, while subjectivity is unreliable. This presupposition informs Hirsch's Validity in Interpretation and The Aims of Interpretation. He argues that a distinction exists between meaning, which is stable and reasonably objective, and significance, which is flexible and subjective. He bases his distinction on his understanding of the classical hermeneutic pattern involving the functions of criticism, the subtilitas intelligendi and the subtilitas explicandi. Briefly, Hirsch requires that the critic should pass through understanding, in which the

meaning is constructed according to its own terms, on to interpretation, in which meaning is explained in terms familiar to the interpreter and audience. At this point, Hirsch asserts, meaning is complete; the ensuing activities of application or evaluation yield only significance--the construction of a relation between the text and something else not innate to it.¹⁵ From this position, Hirsch can claim that there is "no objectivity unless meaning itself is unchanging."¹⁶ From here he also deplores the excesses of Heidegger and Gadamer, both of whom he accuses of diluting the hermeneutic process by introducing subjective historical consciousness into the formula.

In The Aims of Interpretation, Hirsch introduces a helpful distinction with respect to hermeneutics when he discusses its three dimensions. After restating in his introductory chapter his opposition between objective meaning and subjective significance, he goes on to discuss the differences between medieval allegoresis (which he views as anachronistic), historicism (embodied in Schleiermacher's desire for recovery), and "metaphysical" interpretation (represented by Heidegger's attempts to go beyond the text).¹⁷ In his discussion of "anachronistic" and "historicist" modes of interpretation, Hirsch concedes that no compelling logical reason exists for interpreters to seek original meaning. But when he turns to Heidegger, his eirenic pose falters, and on ethical grounds he argues for the need to recover intended meanings. Such a need requires descriptive, not normative (or "metaphysical") hermeneutics, and Hirsch reveals that while in his view interpretation is inseparably linked to understanding, application is divorced from it, belonging instead to the realm of significance. Hirsch's separation of application from understanding, and criticism

from interpretation, is a source of contention, for if one accepts the presupposition of subjective hermeneutic thinkers--that interpretation is always directed by some anticipatory understanding--then one cannot utterly divorce meaning from significance, or interpretation from application. For example, Joel Weinsheimer argues that "application is fundamental because it is an answer to the question, What is literature for?" He goes on to demonstrate that what Hirsch calls "pure interpretatio alone" is impossible, for such an act would render the occasional nature of a work invalid, and all literature is occasional because it represents a particular reaction to a particular event or experience.¹⁸ And as we shall see in Chapter 3, Jauss further qualifies this problem when he argues that the reception of a work is a measure of its value.

In considering the descriptive and normative aspects of hermeneutics, Hirsch urges that "theorists should disengage the descriptive dimension of hermeneutics, which concerns the nature of interpretation, from the normative dimension, which concerns its goals."¹⁹ He bases this separation on the idea that goals are determined by value-preferences, and as such are ideological, not analytical; he denies that descriptions can be determined by value-preferences, assuming a kind of scientific "purity" of analysis, which--in relation to literary or historical texts--many theorists find difficult to accept. He goes on to elaborate the difference between meaning, which he defines as "the determinate representation of a text for an interpreter," and significance, which he defines as "meaning-as-related-to-something-else."²⁰ Hirsch dwells on the distinction because he believes it can help resolve certain disagreements regarding the role of historical consciousness. He dismisses the Heideggerian formula, that "whatever we

know is decisively accommodated to our own historical world and cannot be known to us apart from the determining context."²¹ Yet it is precisely this attribute which will enlarge the scope of interpretation by accounting for the "particular reaction to a particular event or experience." The distinctions among descriptive, normative, and metaphysical aspects of hermeneutics are too rigid as Hirsch depicts them. Perhaps the distinctions are idealistic, but Hirsch's decision to separate them is ultimately just as much a normative decision as Heidegger's decision to temporalize the hermeneutic experience. Moreover, Hirsch's decision can have unfortunate results, for it can lead to a narrowing of meaning to authorial intention rather than to an expansion of meaning to encompass authorial and audience experience.

Hirsch might be accused of begging the question of whether meaning is as stable as he claims. He notes that meaning cannot be reproduced without the postulate of determinate meaning, and he then asserts that since there is reproducibility, there must be determinate meaning. Such apparently circular reasoning might lead one to question the efficacy of other concepts discussed by him. One such concept in Validity in Interpretation is his identification of meaning with authorial intention. What Hirsch calls intention is similar to Husserl's concept of intentionality--a process of consciousness by which different intentional acts (on different occasions) "intend" or project an identical intentional object.²² However, Hirsch seems to confuse the referent, the intentional object, for truth-value, thus suggesting that the author's intention is necessarily true.²³ Hirsch does temper his position somewhat in The Aims of Interpretation, but he does not abandon his belief in the determinacy of meaning. A major source of

difficulty is Hirsch's overall perception of hermeneutics; Palmer, for example, remarks that Hirsch "is not concerned with the subjective process of understanding . . . or with relating an understood meaning to the present . . . but with the problem of umpiring between already understood meanings."²⁴ The hermeneutic problem as Hirsch perceives it is primarily philological, and in the process of securing his position he seems to ignore the fact that choosing any position is a normative decision. In effect, Hirsch's theory begins after understanding and ends before application, and so presents a rather limited approach to hermeneutics in light of pedagogical concerns.

Having raised the pedagogical issue, we might now consider certain troubling questions about validity which affect our teaching. If Hirsch's theory is too restrictive, must we then resign ourselves to a relativism in which all interpretations are considered equal? What standards can a teacher invoke to justify dismissing some interpretations? In addressing these questions, I repeat that the alternative to Hirsch's monism is not necessarily unrestrained relativism. As Armstrong suggests, we commonly apply tests for validity "that act as constraints on interpretation and mark a boundary between permissible and illegitimate readings."²⁵ He identifies these tests as inclusiveness, intersubjectivity, and efficacy. Inclusiveness involves the number of elements which can be encompassed in discussing a work, the number of parts that fit the whole without provoking anomaly. Intersubjectivity involves the number of readings which agree with our own, a kind of communal agreement. Efficacy is the evaluation of a hypothesis or presupposition, on pragmatic grounds, to see whether it can lead to a new awareness or comprehension. None of these tests is sufficient to

establish one "right" interpretation, but they do impose some constraints. While Hirsch would probably not reject these criteria, he might prefer to control the breadth of their application. Nevertheless, these constraints are considered by two critics who counter Hirsch--Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Robert Jauss--and whom we shall consider again in Chapter 3. At this time I wish to examine how Gadamer and Jauss incorporate these constraints in their hermeneutic theories, allowing for a criticism which is inherently pluralistic but nonetheless rational.

Gadamer seeks to make hermeneutics the study of understanding itself--an historical process for both the interpreter and what he interprets. Gadamer's Truth and Method is a pivotal work for hermeneutics; his premises derive from Heidegger's Being and Time, and he clarifies some difficult sections in that treatise while giving a critique of traditional hermeneutics. For example, Gadamer states that the position represented by Schleiermacher naively views reading as a "divinatory process, a placing of oneself within the mind of the author" ²⁶ Gadamer reveals more of an affinity with the phenomenological approach of Heidegger, and he accedes to Heidegger's view of understanding as a process of forestructuring. Understanding a work of art transcends subjective horizons of interpretation in a kind of dialectic, not between opposed theses in the Hegelian sense, but between one's own horizon and that of "tradition." The object of this intersubjective exchange is for the being encountered--in this case the work--to reveal itself. In fact, Gadamer's entire discussion of aesthetic consciousness owes a great deal to Heidegger's belief that the reader becomes more fully present as he or she encounters the unity and selfhood of the work

as world. This belief will also be seen as a central thesis for the phenomenologist theories of Poulet and other Geneva Critics.

For Gadamer, understanding is an historical, dialectical, linguistic event; it always presupposes a point of view. Consequently, understanding always involves application, whereas for Hirsch, as we have seen, they are distinct activities. Gadamer would contend that the literary text, if it originates in an earlier period, has already been interpreted; thus the reader inevitably responds to prior interpretations as well as to the text. Yet the present situation is never identical with the past, so the interpreter must reinterpret the history of precedents in terms of the present context.²⁷ As Jauss will point out, this reinterpretation does not ignore the past so much as subsume it in the present. As for the possibility of validity in interpretation, which Hirsch bases on reproducibility, Gadamer posits the "anticipation of perfection" as a criterion; this position is based on his conviction that a work embodies a unity of meaning. The "anticipation of perfection" allows not only for the immanence of the text but also for its truth, which Gadamer interprets as transcendence of the text's meaning beyond its subject matter.²⁸ In effect, where Hirsch desires the "correct" understanding of a text, Gadamer desires deeper and "truer" understanding--what Hirsch calls significance. For Gadamer, validity is not the issue so much as the transcendence of the text in the quest for meaning.

These two hermeneutic approaches can be brought closer together if we accept a premise that Hirsch somewhat disingenuously implies in The Aims of Interpretation, that the text's intention leads to its interpretation. Supposing that there is no "one right interpretation," since

interpretation requires continual mediation of past and present, we can argue that the work comes into actuality only in a dialogue between the interpreter and the work. Hirsch is justified in his concern over the possibility of subjectivism as a result of this focus on the individual interpreter. Yet all subjectivism is not necessarily inappropriate. For example, David Hoy distinguishes between radical subjectivism, which results in an impossibility of agreement through rational discourse, and contextualism, in which the appropriateness of different lines of interpretation can be examined.²⁹ Contextualism requires justifying reasons for an interpretation. To a degree, efforts toward contextualism are guided by generic considerations. One must attempt to explain the interrelation between the tendency of interpretation to see language as bound to a context and the tendency of poetry to break free from established contexts, even developing a context of its own. For example, the recent American interest in the technique of "defamiliarization" as posited by the Russian formalists centers on the liberation of the text from certain contexts, as well as on the text's exploitation of those contexts. Yet for all this interest in formal and stylistic contexts, one cannot ignore Gadamer's assertion that the context of the work, both at its moment of appearance and its moment of interpretation, is fundamentally historical.

The necessity of context in interpretation does not rule out critical discussion of conditions and criteria for interpretation. In fact, the constant movement--anticipation and recollection--of interpretation requires an awareness of previous interpretations, for each reading is at least implicitly a criticism of other readings due to interpretation's partial and perspectival nature.³⁰ Perhaps the most

important criterion for judging interpretation is related to the test of efficacy in evaluating the validity of a reading. That criterion is the ability of the interpretation to lead us to increased awareness and comprehension of ourselves. Interpretation and understanding of the work contribute to a process of self-understanding--one must understand not only the words in the text and their relations, but also the reasons why the words exert a claim on the reader. The affective dimension of understanding will influence the reader-response theories of Fish, Iser, and Jauss. For Gadamer and Jauss, the affective dimension is linked to the historical nature of the interpretation because that dimension changes and has its own history and tradition. Hirsch, of course, would still object that they are dealing in significance, not meaning.

Hirsch's bifurcation of meaning and significance is the most difficult issue with which we have to contend. We have already considered the polarization as Hirsch envisions it in Validity in Interpretation: meaning is objective and entails interpretation and description, while significance is subjective and entails application and evaluation. Gadamer dispels this dichotomy by denying that one can divorce meaning from significance. By a rather circuitous process he associates both meaning and significance with experience: "If something is called or considered an experience its meaning rounds it into the unity of a significant whole."³¹ An experience thus establishes itself in memory, and we can say that an experience has a lasting memory for someone who has had the experience. Gadamer then develops the connection between experience and meaning: "the unity of experience determined by its intentional content stands in an immediate relationship to the whole, to the totality of life."³² Finally, Gadamer brings this process to bear

on the aesthetic experience:

The aesthetic experience is not just one kind of experience among others, but represents the essence of experience itself. As the work of art as such is a world for itself, what is experienced aesthetically is, as an experience, removed from all connections with actuality.³³

We can infer from this description that for Gadamer a work's meaning is its actualization of lived experience, its concretization of a life-world. Obviously, that experience must be lived by someone, so the subjective element is unavoidable in determining meaning.

Gadamer later investigates the process of aesthetic differentiation--how we recognize a work of art--and this investigation also tends toward a general fusion of meaning and significance. He asserts that any object is always seen as something, and that seeing implies differentiation, a perception of the "otherness" of the work. As far as literary works of art are concerned, "only when we understand a text--that is, at least be in command of its language--can it be for us a work of literary art."³⁴ Gadamer then concludes that pure perception is impossible but always includes meaning, and from that conclusion he generalizes:

Aesthetic experience also is a mode of self-understanding. But all self-understanding takes place in relation to something else that is understood and includes the unity and sameness of this other. Inasmuch as we encounter the work of art in the world and a world in the individual work of art, this does not remain a strange universe into which we are magically transported for a time. Rather, we learn to understand ourselves in it, and that means that we preserve the discontinuity of the experience in the continuity of our existence.³⁵

Hirsch might dismiss this passage as sheer metaphysical speculation, but in Gadamer's view of aesthetic experience we find a reunion of

meaning and significance; we also find the raw material from which Jauss fashions his literary hermeneutics.

Although Jauss has written voluminously on various aspects of literary hermeneutics, his articles have generally appeared at wide intervals and in shortened form. Only recently have his essays been collected into two volumes so that his theory can be assessed as a system. Jauss's approach is eclectic; the Konstanz school of which he is a member has strong ties with the phenomenological ontology of Roman Ingarden, while Jauss himself is well trained in the history of literature as taught by Erich Auerbach and Ernst Curtius. Indeed, Jauss is primarily interested in rehabilitating the study of "literary history," but through a dialectic which understands literature as fully historical without isolating it or losing sight of its special nature. His theory of Rezeptionsästhetik ("aesthetic of reception")--which he posits as a solution to the dilemma of interpretation--resembles American reader-response criticism. As Jauss views it, the task of literary hermeneutics is to trace the history of aesthetic experience in all its contexts, taking into account not only how art has altered the society that receives it, but also how society has influenced the reception of art. He is thus equally interested in the interpretation and application of the work; in fact, his methodology consists equally of the hermeneutic activities understanding, interpretation, and application. His approach is not solely theoretical either, for he provides close readings of various works from different periods to illustrate his methods. Because his theory is firmly based on the reception of a work by an audience, his method will be discussed fully in the third chapter, on reader-response criticism. In summary, though, Jauss's

blend of classical hermenutics and modern reader-response theory provides a useful synthesis in the establishment of an interpretive method which allows for constrained subjectivity.

To conclude this chapter on hermenutics, let us return to our point of departure, Paul Armstrong's essay. Armstrong calls the disagreement between monists and relativists a "strong" disagreement. Such a dispute "may begin with differences about how to construe a particular text," but ultimately depends on "divergences between the basic presuppositions underlying the opposing methods."³⁶ Beliefs that constitute a theory of interpretation may be a priori ethical, but they must still attempt to justify themselves through philosophical reflections. Hirsch's hermeneutic theory is less open to this kind of justification than Gadamer's, for Gadamer at least does not separate the normative from the descriptive in his theory. In insisting on the involvement of individual understanding in the actualization of meaning, Gadamer becomes vulnerable to accusations of subjectivity, but it is not dogmatic subjectivism or radical relativism. There are limits to pluralism, and these constraints can best be understood by examining their manifestations in phenomenology and reader-response criticism, the subjects of the next two chapters.

NOTES

¹ Paul B. Armstrong, "The Conflict of Interpretations and the Limits of Pluralism," PMLA, 98 (1983), 341.

² Armstrong, 341.

³ Walter Kendrick, "What Is This Thing Called Hermeneutics?" Village Voice, 14 June 1983, 8.

⁴ Richard E. Palmer, Hermeneutics (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 13.

⁵ Armstrong, 341.

⁶ Another useful distinction is Paul Ricoeur's division of the hermeneutic field into "archaeological" and "teleological" methods. Archaeological interpretation is a hermeneutics of suspicion in which meaning is unmasked. Teleological interpretation is a hermeneutics of trust in which meaning is found beyond, not behind, the text. Ricoeur makes this distinction in The Conflict of Interpretations (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 21-22.

⁷ This synopsis is derived chiefly from Palmer's chapter on Schleiermacher, pp. 84-97, which is based principally on his reading of Schleiermacher's Hermeneutik (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1959) and Hermeneutik und Kritik (Berlin: Reimer, 1838).

⁸ Palmer, p. 98. This synopsis is derived chiefly from Palmer's chapter on Dilthey, pp. 98-123, which is based on his reading of Dilthey's Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1957) and Gesammelte Schriften (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1913-1967).

⁹ Palmer, p. 107.

¹⁰ In thus characterizing Hirsch's method, I am aware of his modification of this earlier position. For example, in The Aims of Interpretation (p. 79), he seeks to shift the center of stability from author to text, but given his ethical preference for determining authors' meanings later in the same chapter, his argument seems rather disingenuous.

¹¹ David Couzens Hoy, The Critical Circle (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 4.

- 12 Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 75.
- 13 Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 150.
- 14 Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 262-263.
- 15 E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 129.
- 16 Hirsch, Validity, p. 214.
- 17 Hirsch, The Aims of Interpretation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 74ff.
- 18 Joel Weinsheimer, "'London' and the Fundamental Problem of Hermeneutics," Critical Inquiry, 9 (1982), 306. Hirsch's theory of "corrigible schemata" does recognize the existence of preunderstanding, but he disarms this recognition through his ethical posture.
- 19 Hirsch, Aims, p. 75.
- 20 Hirsch, Aims, pp. 79-80.
- 21 Hirsch, Aims, p. 81.
- 22 Hoy, p. 29. See also Edmund Husserl, Ideas, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier Books, 1975), pp. 109-111, for a complete explanation.
- 23 Robert R. Magliola, Phenomenology and Literature (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1977), p. 98.
- 24 Palmer, p. 62.
- 25 Armstrong, 346.
- 26 Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. Sheed and Ward Ltd. (New York: Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1975), p. 164.
- 27 Hoy, p. 54.
- 28 Hoy, pp. 107-108.
- 29 Hoy, p. 69.
- 30 Hoy, p. 114.
- 31 Gadamer, p. 60.
- 32 Gadamer, p. 61.

³³ Gadamer, p. 62.

³⁴ Gadamer, p. 62.

³⁵ Gadamer, p. 86.

³⁶ Armstrong, 344. The disagreement here seems to be between two versions of hermeneutics. Hirsch's archeological hermeneutics suspects that the original meaning is present in the text and need only be recovered. The teleological hermeneutics trusts that one's interpretation is guided by certain limitations built into the context, although original meaning cannot be recovered.

CHAPTER 2 PHENOMENOLOGY

Background and History

Phenomenology has been defined and understood in several ways since its emergence as a major philosophical study during the eighteenth century. In his Neue Organon (1764), Lambert assigned the term to the theory of the appearances fundamental to all empirical knowledge. Kant, in his Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft (1786), adopted the word to express a similar though more restricted sense; for him, phenomenon meant the appearance of reality in consciousness, as opposed to noumenon, or the being of reality in itself (unknowable to man). On the other hand, in Hegel's Phänomenologie des Geistes (1807), phenomenology has an historical perspective: it is the "science" describing the development which natural phenomenal consciousness undergoes by way of science and philosophy toward absolute knowledge of the Absolute. And Moritz Lazarus, in his Leben der Seele (1856-57), distinguishes phenomenology from psychology: the former describes the phenomena of mental life, and the latter seeks their causal explanation.¹

These disparate descriptions and explanations lead us to question whether or not there is, in fact, a body of knowledge or a method which can be organized under the rubric phenomenology. Moreover, we might question what its significance can be for literary criticism. In response to the first question, György M. Vajda observes that the modern view of phenomenology holds that the world is not divided into essence and phenomenon, as suggested by Kant and Hegel. Rather, by

analyzing consciousness itself, one simultaneously examines subjective cognizance and its object. A basic presupposition for this approach is that description of a phenomenon makes it possible to grasp and know its essence instead of its mere semblance.² A slight extrapolation makes it possible for us to respond to the second question; the significance of phenomenology to literary criticism is that we are encouraged to "grasp and know" the characteristics of the literary work as object of subjective cognizance. Yet Vajda hints at a potentially troublesome ambiguity when he suggests that a literary work is not only a closed object but an open world, constantly interacting with reality; the properties of the work do not change under the influence of constantly changing objective reality--rather, the function value of the work constantly changes.³

The "overwhelming question" for the application of phenomenology to literary criticism seems to be, "What is the essential nature of the literary work?" Yet this question is followed by another: "What really is the concern of our study, the work itself or the experience of the work?" For that matter, can we really separate the work from the experience? Phenomenology avoids the question of the work's production, which is properly the focus of psychological examination. But if phenomenological analysis is concerned solely with the realized work, does not the burden of Kantian dualism, the separation of subject and object, weigh heavily on the shoulders of phenomenological critics? This dilemma runs as an undercurrent through the evolution of phenomenological criticism and seems to have contributed to a divergence of interests. In one channel flows phenomenology applied to readings of literature, in keeping with a concern for the experience of literature;

this approach characterizes the Geneva critics. In the other channel flows a more theoretical approach to the ontology of the work as an object of cognizance; this approach characterizes Roman Ingarden, Mikel Dufrenne, and later influences Wolfgang Iser. In order to understand this divergence better, we need to examine in some detail the origins of phenomenological criticism before we can navigate the divergent channels or sound the depths of the critical methodology which they share.

Edmund Husserl was the first thinker to apply the name phenomenology to a whole philosophy, and his usage has largely determined the senses attached to the term in the twentieth century. When Husserl adopted the term, he renounced the dualism between phenomenon and noumenon posited by Kant, and the "constructionism" whereby Hegel moved dialectically from phenomena to the Absolute Mind they supposedly manifest.⁴ In the first edition of his Logische Untersuchungen (1900-01), Husserl defined phenomenology as descriptive analysis of subjective processes in experience. Phenomenology was "pure" only insofar as the phenomenologist distinguishes the subjective from the objective and avoids looking into either the origin of subjective phenomena or their relations to environmental circumstances. More important to our discussion is Husserl's treatment of the bases of Kant's and Hegel's phenomenologies--he agreed with them in asserting that only phenomena are given in subjective processes, but he claimed that the "essence" of that which exists is given only in phenomena.⁵

Early in his career Husserl asserted that contemporary epistemology was stagnant because of its reliance on either idealism, in which the subject is a passive recipient. In both extremes, so far as

Husserl was concerned, "consciousness is wrongly considered a faculty for being conscious instead of an act of being conscious."⁶ Furthermore, both idealist and empiricist agree that the gap between thought and the world cannot be bridged. However, Husserl rejected both of these epistemologies because they fail to treat consciousness as a unified intentional act. For him, consciousness was an act wherein the subject intends (directs himself toward the object), and the object is intended (functions as a target for the intentional act, though the object is independent of that act). The subject and the object are reciprocally implicated, and both are real. In short, Husserl believed that one can arrive at reality through a recognition of "essences" revealed to consciousness.

In addition to his belief in intentionality as the fundamental character of subjective process, Husserl also developed a theory of the epochē and its corollary, the eidetic reduction, which serve as strategies for avoiding exteriority. The epochē--abstention from the natural standpoint--allows one to escape the privileged position (by which Husserl means a stance toward the object that presumes prior knowledge) and to establish and maintain the attitude of a mere onlooker, one who does not participate in his own natural attitude of believing in a possible world and apprehending his consciousness as essentially possible in that world. Husserl remarks, "The attempt to doubt everything has its place in the realm of perfect freedom."⁷ Moreover, when one suspends the natural attitude, a prior ground of being comes to light, implying that consciousness seen from the natural attitude is "bracketed" along with accidental, individual qualities of being which are refined away in a reduction to eidōs, or essence of an intentional

object.⁸ The purpose of the breakthrough to pure intentional consciousness and its object, the eidos, is to shift philosophical research to its own formal ground--to bring about a consciousness of consciousness.⁹

In expressing this purpose Husserl was radical:

Thus all sciences which relate to this natural world . . . I disconnect them all, I make absolutely no use of their standards, I do not appropriate a single one of the propositions that enter into their systems . . .¹⁰

This radical position in part inspired Heidegger to discard conventional philosophical formulae.

In his later phases Husserl became progressively appreciative of Descartes and Kant, and eventually he made subjectivity constitutive of objectivity in a revised idealism. Nevertheless, the earlier Husserlian formula--the mutual implication of subject and object--most influenced both the Heideggerians and the Geneva critics. In fact, the presupposition that emerges from Husserl's task, and which influences phenomenological literary criticism, is that human being is an incarnate consciousness directed toward objects. Consequently, human being interprets works as constructs of consciousness that display a world.

Heidegger continued the Husserlian attack on various forms of dualism. Expanding the Husserlian view of consciousness, he declared that consciousness should be viewed as existence itself. The whole human being is "Being-in-the-world," a reciprocal relation of subjectivity and world. Moreover, the human being "is there" (Dasein) in the world, and feels thrown there. Human existence is a movement toward a realization of potential, a process of becoming, which takes place in time. Consciousness of this temporality evokes in man a sense of care (Sorge). In general, whereas Husserl stressed rational acts of

consciousness, Heidegger emphasized "moods"; the effect of his major work, Being and Time, is "to shift focus from intellect-consciousness to a more radical emotion-consciousness."¹¹ Unfortunately, Heidegger's attack on dualism may be compromised by his own brand of aesthetic dualism; as Lentricchia observes, "he fights dualism with the weapons of a dualized and aestheticized terminology that would divide human experience into the beautiful and the mundane."¹² The mundane for Heidegger is represented by das Man, the impersonal and inauthentic "one" who exists in "everyday life"; the beautiful is represented as "being-as-such."

Heidegger's search for a relational context that would resolve Cartesian difficulties was ardent, and he arrived at a phenomenology which is more existential than transcendental. An important facet of the search is his idea of equipmentality, with which he distinguishes between what is "present-at-hand" (Vorhandensein) and what is "ready-to-hand" (Zuhandensein): a distinction between what is merely there and what is there usefully.¹³ What is there usefully--the tool--exists in relation to a human being, and its spiritual as well as spatial relevance is discovered when a tool malfunctions. When such a situation occurs, we become painfully aware of the isolation of subject from object, and the isolation in turn reveals the interrelationship of human being and tool.¹⁴ "World" is thus the inclusive, all-embracing totality of a culturally determined instrumental complex. In effect, Heidegger's elevation of the instrumental over the natural is his way of revealing the essence of the world--world is uncovered for consciousness by the broken tool.

The implications of Heidegger's early phenomenological ontology for literary criticism are suggested in a later essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in which he used the term Kunstwerk. In their equip-mental character, linguistic tools--words, sentences, tropes--help us to pry open the work of art, since both tool and the work display a functional relation of form to matter. Heidegger suggested that only art can help us to an awareness of the complicated interrelations of the "world"; "the phenomenological grasp of being does not happen fortu-itously but only through artistic mediation."¹⁵ He implied that in art, "world" will force itself upon us: "the equipmentality of equipment first genuinely arrives at its appearance through the work and only in the work."¹⁶ In a further sense, art strips the veil of familiarity from the everyday world. Finally, art confirms that being-in-the-world is not personal or private; the essence of the world, as the structural dimension of Dasein, is fundamentally a suprapersonal structure, an "open relational context," which discloses cultural and historical being.¹⁷ Kunstwerk, then, is a dialectical synthesis which captures the "world-opening" quality of broken equipment and the "world-resist-ing" quality of Vorhandensein.

The principal difference between Heidegger's early and later writings is his later faith in the possibilities of poetry, and specifically in the possibility that poetic language can open up the human world--ultimately, poetic language alone will deliver on the promise of phenomenological ontology. Moreover, as Magliola points out, Heideggerian criticism in practice is largely a kind of poetic serendipity.¹⁸ Heideggerian hermeneutics is much less methodical than the cerebrations of Husserl or the "poetic" methodology of the Geneva

critics. The Heideggerian approach is also largely "metapersonal" in the sense that imaginative literature reveals Being and presence, while the personal life-world of the author is relatively unimportant. Withal, Heidegger's theme is existentially humanistic--human being is the measure of all things.

The next philosopher to have an impact on the development of phenomenology was Jean-Paul Sartre, in whom we witness a resolute aestheticism which brings to a close certain nineteenth-century philosophical traditions.¹⁹ His early Psychology of Imagination adumbrates a central theme of Being and Nothingness--a fundamental distinction between the en soi (nonhuman being) and the pour soi (consciousness, human reality). Specifically, two motifs of Sartre's thought have had a special impact on the Geneva critics. The first is the identification of a given individual's intentionality with that individual's "fundamental choice," or freedom. As Magliola explains, "the intentional acts of an individual imply his unique way of 'living' life; they constitute . . . his 'forward throw,' or projet."²⁰ In this reminder of intentionality we can see Sartre's affinity with Husserl and Heidegger. The second motif concerns the nature of the work of art, which Sartre discusses in The Psychology of Imagination and What is Literature? The theories of literary imagination proposed in the first work have had little impact on practical criticism, but Sartre's distinction between prose-art and poetic-art in the latter work can help explain the ontology of the poetic work as the Geneva critics conceive it. Sartre's intention is to elevate prose-art, but what he says of poetic-art situates him in the tradition of phenomenological aesthetics continued by Merleau-Ponty. According to Sartre, the poet

treats language as a sign. "The poetic word is a microcosm," Sartre writes; "Emotion has become thing"21

One further point might help to clarify Sartre's contribution to phenomenological criticism--his modification of traditional dualism. He replaces the dualism of being and appearance with a dualism of the "finite" and the "infinite":

Although an object may disclose itself only through a single Abschattung [appearance], the sole fact of there being a subject implies the possibility of multiplying the points of view on that Abschattung . . . What appears in fact is only an aspect of the object, and the object is altogether in that aspect and altogether outside of it. It is altogether within, in that it manifests itself . . . as the structure of the appearance, which is at the same time the principle of the series.²²

Sartre's phenomenology leads him to reject classical ontology, but his existentialism compromises any claims he might make regarding a Husserlian background. His commitment to the priority of being over consciousness requires that being not be wholly subject to consciousness as the condition of its revelation. In essence, he implies that being is hidden behind phenomena. Consciousness, which for Sartre is an empty spontaneity, implies a world in its intentionality; moreover, this transphenomenal being, the en soi, never reveals itself completely to consciousness. But human being can escape the nonhuman reality of en soi if it disengages from "indetermination" and declares its freedom in human reality, the pour soi. In an act reminiscent of Husserl's epochē, human reality rises to the status of pour soi as it retires into a nothingness beyond the en soi by acknowledging its radical temporality.²³ This process is not, however, conscious; human reality is freedom and is always poised against and outside of the en soi.

The nature of consciousness is explicit in the investigations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the last major contributor to phenomenology we shall consider. In Phenomenology of Perception he denies, as did Heidegger and Sartre, the bifurcation of subject and object by asserting that they are reciprocally implicated. He also carries Husserl's theory of intentionality further by claiming that subject and object are analytically inseparable. According to Merleau-Ponty, all consciousness is a unified subject-object relation. Finally, he also expands the definition of intentionality to include the individual's whole experiential world. This concept bears some resemblance to Sartre's argument that the essence of a phenomenon is an appearance which is no longer opposed to being but is rather the measure of being.²⁴

Merleau-Ponty's theoretical support for practical criticism is most evident in the area of linguistics, notably in a later work, The Prose of the World. His theory of intentionality, so useful in transcending the idealism-empiricism dilemma, is also quite useful in his treatment of language. He regards language as an intentional act. As intentional act, language is a gestural action; it is not a sign for meaning but an embodiment of meaning. The embodiment is richest and desnest in poetic language because in it conceptual and non-conceptual elements play roles approximating their importance in human life.²⁵ Merleau-Ponty reserves the term la parole for language that expresses concretely. His theory of parole strikes a balance between language understood as sign and language regarded as autonomous. In one sense, words are gestural embodiments of meanings; one cannot abjure the

language-structure and find meaning elsewhere. In another sense, because the language-structure as embodiment is gestural, language-structure must be interpreted as a speaker's expression. In short, since language is a unified action linking subject and object, it cannot be isolated from its origins.²⁶

Perhaps Merleau-Ponty's most significant contribution to the hermeneutic project is his formulation of a process, adopted from Husserl, by which an object can be experienced phenomenologically and the experience then described. This process consists of four steps: the natural attitude, the suspension of natural attitude, the phenomenological description, and the transcendental analytic. In the establishment of the natural attitude (paralleled by the Heideggerian notion of pre-understanding), one brings to an object prejudgements and presuppositions. As this step does not progress beyond initial expectations and received interpretations, one must then attempt to suspend the natural attitude by confronting the nature of these prejudgements and moving beyond them. This move can be accomplished only partially, for the natural attitude is part of the historically conditioned world of lived experience, vestiges of which will persist. But having recognized the restrictive boundaries and attempted to suspend them, one can then move to a phenomenological description, in which step one views the equipmental nature of the object and its manner of "intending" other objects through association, including one's self, as well as another historical essence. One is now prepared to attempt a transcendental analysis, in which step patterns and structures of association reveal themselves. The results of this step are often ambiguous, for in identifying the patterns of association one discovers

that he or she is still reliant on the natural attitude for assignment of categories. Still, the process does reveal the nature of experience so far as Merleau-Ponty conceives it.

The significance of applying this process to literature and thereby producing phenomenological criticism was suggested at the opening of this chapter in reference to Vajda--the reader is encouraged to "grasp and know" the essence of the literary work as object of subjective cognizance. What the essence is appears problematic; some critics might argue that its essence is its theme, or its truth-value, while others might argue that the work's form is its essence. Thus the opposing currents of Geneva criticism of consciousness and phenomenological ontology arise. Despite their apparent differences, however, they still share a common conception--that the work's essence is its expression of experience. It remains for us to consider in the second part what some of those experiences might be and how they are expressed.

Phenomenology and the Geneva Critics

The work of the Geneva critics--the "critics of consciousness"--is founded on practical application. The rubric under which these critics are gathered is somewhat misleading, for not all its members would acknowledge that they share the same interests or methodology. Nevertheless, as Magliola asserts, they are all phenomenological critics because "essentialist and existentialist phenomenology are ultimately the most important formative influences on the critics in question."²⁷ I shall adhere to Magliola's organization of these critics as his approach is roughly chronological: "Marcel Raymond and Albert Béguin constitute the first generation of the Geneva school . . . Georges Poulet . . . figures as the important link between the first

and second generations of the school . . . Jean-Pierre Richard, Jean Rousset, Jean Starobinski, and J. Hillis Miller."²⁸ All of these critics share a common origin, and to some degree a common tone; Sarah Lawall observes that their work is characterized by moral and humanistic accents, and their method is a spiritual historicism based on existential evidence in the work.²⁹

The first two critics of the Geneva circle, Raymond and Béguin, are more properly proto-phenomenologists. Raymond's early work, Dé Baudelaire au Surréalisme, exhibits a metaphysical awareness of the creative act, but his awareness is combined with a traditional scholarly method of interpretation. His later work, notably Vérité et poésie, is ideological; in Magliola's words, "he only approves of literature which measures up to his personal conception of the Divine."³⁰ J. Hillis Miller is kinder in his assessment of Raymond's significance; according to Miller, Raymond proposes that the critic "enter into a state of profound receptivity in which his being becomes extremely sensitized," and "yield bit by bit to a penetrating sympathy."³¹ But as Miller goes on to observe, Raymond's work constitutes a thoroughly scholastic history of ideas tracing the development of modern French poetry from Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé. Béguin also is more of a forerunner than a full-fledged phenomenologist. His L'Ame romantique et la Rêve criticizes old French positivism but retains many of the techniques associated with traditional scholarship.³² He asserts that authentic literary criticism is possible only "if the commentator situates himself in the interior of the universe created by the author." Unlike Raymond, Béguin grants the critic an active role; the critic should be overtly "interested, engaged in an adventure,

pursuing, under the guardianship of familiar poets, a continuous research."³³ Ultimately, however, the major thrust of his work is ideological; he finds in all poets he admires something like the analogical symbolism of the middle ages, which allows an object to express some specific quality of the divine life without ceasing to be itself. His criticism makes the literary text subservient to a "higher truth," and that truth, for Béguin, is Catholicism.³⁴

Georges Poulet acts as a pivotal figure between the two generations of the Geneva school. Although he declines to identify himself with the literature or the methods of other phenomenologists, and even characterizes himself as a Cartesian, Poulet views criticism as beginning and ending in a coincidence of the critic's mind and the author's mind.³⁵ His aim has been to recreate as precisely as possible the exact tone which persists in a writer's oeuvre. His means of accomplishing this aim explain his self-characterization; he places great value on defining the Cogito of each writer. Yet his definition of this Cartesian concept is largely phenomenological; he sees the Cogito as the revelation of the self to itself in "an act of self-consciousness" which separates the mind from everything exterior to it.³⁶ This apparently phenomenological commitment to consciousness as the living source of literature is what distinguishes Poulet's criticism from criticism presupposing a Husserlian conception of consciousness. For most phenomenological critics, consciousness is always consciousness of something; for Poulet, the Cogito knows nothing but itself. As Miller observes, "Poulet's criticism, then, may more exclusively be defined as 'consciousness of consciousness' than either the religiously-oriented criticism of Raymond and Béguin or the thematic criticism of Bachelard and Richard."³⁷

Lest we be misled by Poulet's own, possibly disingenuous, account of his practice, let us examine more closely what this consciousness of consciousness entails. In La Conscience critique, Poulet distinguishes among three kinds of epistemologies found in the literary work, the first of which is clearly phenomenological: "the consciousness inherent in the work . . . is in direct rapport with a world which is its world, with objects which are its objects."³⁸ Later he observes, "it seemed to me that the whole Cogito I was surveying comprised in the indissolubility of one and the same act a total presence of self to self and a total presence of the world to self."³⁹ Moreover, criticism is made possible by a convergence of human minds; "all human minds form a living whole, and the history of literature may therefore be defined as 'a history of human consciousness.'"⁴⁰ Poulet sums up criticism of consciousness in La Pensée de Jean Starobinski when he writes, "Criticism exists in a disavowal of self analogous to that required by mystic thought: by suppressing the distinction between subject and object, by becoming the being of another being, and by alienating one's own being."⁴¹ This passage uses imagery similar to that of early Husserl and Sartre, but it functions to articulate a step which is merely transient.

The phenomenological epistemology serves only as a way station in the ascent to a second kind of epistemology: "There is still a different, more elevated plane in the work: abandoning its forms, the consciousness reveals itself to itself by transcending all that is reflected in it."⁴² The formula is Cartesian, and sounds like Husserlian idealism, particularly in Poulet's claim that the purpose of critical method is to make the subject recognize the primacy of

subjective consciousness. Finally, Poulet urges ascent to a third epistemology, where consciousness "reflects nothing Then all that one can say of it is what exists there of consciousness. At this point, no object can any longer express it, no structure can any longer determine it, it uncovers itself in its ineffability, in all its fundamental indetermination."⁴³ These epistemologies combine to form a critical method which is personal yet objective, and which could be self-consuming; if the third epistemology is attainable, doesn't it negate literature? Poulet's own criticism denies this possibility, for he assumes an order and coherence implicit in literature as human expression of consciousness.⁴⁴ In its totality, then, Poulet's practice remains phenomenological in that it describes a life-world which is a mutual implication of self and other.

Within the second generation of the Geneva school, Jean-Pierre Richard exhibits the influence of Merleau-Ponty; he weighs the balance of intentionality in favor of the outside world. More specifically, Richard believes that there is no originating moment when consciousness is empty of any content but the presence of the self to the self. He also affirms that poetry originates from material images, phrases or passages that express some way in which subject and object can be joined through bodily sensation.⁴⁵ For him, the privileged modes of access to the world are sensation and emotion, as he suggests in Poésie et profondeur, where he claims that poetry must have depth as well as sensations. The writer must found his or her work on some limitless depth, the "being" which is present in each sensation. Whereas Richard is concerned with the field between person and thing, Jean Starobinski's main concern is intersubjectivity, the intentional

field generated between person and person.⁴⁶ Starobinski views consciousness as existing "because it appears to itself. But it cannot appear to itself without bringing into existence a world to which it is indissolubly connected."⁴⁷ Yet his interest in intersubjective relations in literature is preeminent, and he views literary criticism as a type of intersubjectivity. In his theoretical essay prefacing L'Oeil vivant, he explains that criticism must live in a movement between proximity and distance, opacity and transparency.⁴⁸ Understanding the work of literature alternately from the inside and from the outside, the critic may ultimately attain a fuller understanding of himself or herself. Jean Rousset's work differs from that of other Geneva school members because he is concerned with the structure as well as the themes of literary works. He uses antiformal, humanistic criteria to analyze the formal textual use of extraliterary perceptions; for him, each work has its own unique structure. He first analyzes textual themes to show how they imply an ideal work, but he then turns to an increased understanding of the real work's aims.⁴⁹ He articulates these aims in the introduction to Forme et signification: the work of literature is "the simultaneous development of a structure and a way of thinking, the amalgamation of a form and of an experience which are interdependent in their genesis and growth."⁵⁰ Rousset also posits the sympathetic intuition of the reader as a means for delimiting the structure of a work; the reader should remain alert for the work's "signal," its revealing structural fact that will indicate the ideal work, of which the real work is only a suggestion.⁵¹ Finally, of these second generation Geneva critics, the major American representative is J. Hillis Miller in his work prior to 1970. Although he no longer

practices criticism of consciousness, his early works, notably his study of Dickens, were heavily influenced by Poulet, whom he knew at Johns Hopkins University. Miller's early work echoes Poulet's doctrine that an author in his or her works takes part in a personal adventure. Moreover, the works themselves represent the author's continual progress toward self-recognition. The author ultimately reveals his or her existential attitude through the choice of words and patterns of literary images and events.⁵²

For all the critics of the Geneva school, criticism is principally the expression of a "reciprocal transparency" of the mind of the critic and the mind of the author; they differ primarily in their conceptions of the nature of consciousness. Their fundamental similarity allows us to define their approach as "consciousness of consciousness" or "literature about literature."⁵³ Miller traces their roots back to nineteenth-century writers like Pater and Ruskin, and even Romantic criticism via Coleridge. But whereas other critics tend to view criticism as a mode of objective knowledge, one of the "human sciences," the Geneva critics have treated literary criticism as in itself a form of literature--a form which takes as its theme experiences after they have been assimilated into a work. It is in this treatment of criticism as a form of literature that the Geneva critics diverge most dramatically from other phenomenologists, particularly those whose concern is chiefly the aesthetics of the work in general or the aesthetic experience in general--the phenomenological ontologists.

The Ontology of the Literary Work

Two figures stand out as major theorists of phenomenological ontology applied to criticism: Roman Ingarden and Mikel Dufrenne.

Neither man is a critic; each could best be described as a philosopher.

Ingarden's The Literary Work of Art describes the literary work as a stratified structure whose strata constitute a "polyphonic harmony."

This description can be invoked as support for the Geneva critics' discussion of a work's "verbal tissue" and imaginative substance.⁵⁴

Ingarden also defines intentionality and discusses its relation to the literary work. In a less well-known work, The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art, Ingarden attempts to explain the phenomenology of the act of reading and interpreting literature, an activity which Dufrenne also treats in his major work, Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience.

Dufrenne avers that literature "exhibits" its author; the author is present in the text, and the aesthetic perceiver must seek out the author's projet in the text's "world." For Ingarden, the goal of the reader should be the "duplication" of the author's acts of "sense-bestowing"; to this extent the author's intentionality remains the arbiter of the reader's response.⁵⁵ Both Ingarden and Dufrenne provide a more theoretical approach than the Geneva critics, who are principally interested in phenomenologically analyzing particular works by particular authors. Ingarden and Dufrenne are principally concerned with describing the generic work or the experience of it in phenomenological terms.

Ingarden sets forth his purpose in the preface to The Literary Work of Art: he proposes to describe the "basic structure and mode of existence" of the literary work of art.⁵⁶ Part one addresses such preliminary questions as the inadequacy of contemporary definitions of the literary work and the elimination of factors extraneous to the literary work. Significantly, Ingarden refuses to describe literary structure as

either ideal or real, and he even rejects the necessity of choosing between these two ontic modes, as he also rejects psychologism. He points out that the author's experience is inaccessible and the reader's is nonreiterative. Such conditions could lead to the conclusion that each experience is a new literary work. Ingarden disagrees and concentrates on the essential nature of the literary work rather than on its formative stages. He excludes the author from discussion except where unavoidable, declaring that "the author and his work constitute two heterogeneous objects, which, already on the basis of their radical heterogeneity, must be fully differentiated."⁵⁷ Ingarden also excludes the perception of the work by the reader, for the reader "often uses the literary work of art as an external stimulus for evoking, within himself, feelings and other psychic states he considers valuable."⁵⁸

Part two is called "The Structure of the Literary Work," and in it Ingarden describes a structure consisting of four heterogeneous yet interdependent strata: (1) word sound and higher phonetic formations, (2) meaning units, (3) represented objectivities, and (4) schematized aspects and aspect continua. He also identifies a fifth valence, "ideas" or "metaphysical qualities," which is present in great works of art. Of the other four strata, the meaning units stratum is central because although it requires the other three, it also determines them so that they are ontically grounded there. Each stratum has an aesthetic value of its own and contributes to the "polyphonic harmony" and therefore the organic unity of the structure as a whole. A brief account of their interaction would read thus: word-sounds, which are unchangeable and intersubjective, are gathered together into meaning-units in context-syntagmas and sentence patterns. Out of the syntactic

structure arise objects represented, the "world" of characters and setting. Finally, schematized aspects are those properties of "real" objects which inform the world of represented objects. Concrete aspects and schematic aspects must be distinguished carefully, the latter being a kind of "skeleton" which permits the appearance of a thing to retain its self-identity.⁵⁹

Part three, "Supplementation and Conclusions," restores literature to its contacts with reader and culture in order to discover what problems exist. Although he earlier mentions two factors which will inspire Iser—"spots of indeterminacy" and "schematized aspects"—Ingarden concedes that a reader rarely adverts to them. Instead, during the reading of a work concretizations of represented objects and schematized aspects form the mode of appearance of the work. Concretizations, while dependent on variable acts of apprehension, are nevertheless quite distinct. They have an ontic base in subjective acts, but they have a second ontic base in the literary work itself. A summary account of the implications of this process is provided by Magliola:

While Ingarden disclaims here a comprehensive theory coordinating conscious experience and ontically heteronomous objectivities, he does provide some indications . . . psychic components are known only through an attentive gaze into experience itself . . . But when reading a literary work, the reader focuses attention not on his or her own psychic life, but on the literary work.⁶⁰

Ingarden's disclaimer regarding the relationship between conscious experience and ontically heteronomous objectivities is linked to a reference to his other work, The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art. This work, along with the theory about "spots of indeterminacy," seems

to have strongly influenced Iser in the development of his reader-response approach. In Cognition, Ingarden considers two attitudes common to readers approaching a text: that of the scholar reading for the purpose of research, and that of the reader wishing to form an aesthetic concretization of the text. The purpose of the literary work of art is to lead the reader to the concretization of an aesthetic object. Ingarden is principally interested in the attitude of the reader who "investigates" the text, who wants to attain a "true and well-grounded answer to the question of how the work is structured, to which genre it belongs, etc."⁶¹ In the aesthetic attitude, some objects which one cognizes can be used as stimulants in order to produce strange experiences which are enjoyable or pleasant. These experiences may be sensuous, contemplative, or empathetic, depending on which point of view the reader adopts. In summary, Ingarden discusses many processes which enter into the cognition of the literary work. Signs and verbal sounds must be apprehended, and verbal and sentence meanings must be understood. The reader must objectify from intentional states of affairs to objects depicted in the work, and must then concretize the portrayed objectivity. All the strata of the work should then be combined into a whole so that its meaning may be apprehended.

Dufrenne's Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience deals with all the arts, so we shall concentrate only on that section which is concerned with literature--the first section. Dufrenne's introduction charts his overall enterprise. By aesthetic experience he means that of the perceiver, not of the author. The aesthetic object then becomes the correlate of the perceiver's experience, just as the experience in turn is the correlate of the aesthetic object.⁶² Dufrenne follows

Ingarden in two ways: he denounces psychologism and distinguishes between intending act and object intended, and he distinguishes aesthetic object from the "work of art." He differs from Ingarden in denying that the work of art is real and the aesthetic object ideal. Later in Phenomenology he even denies the uniqueness of the status Ingarden calls heteronomy, claiming that "every object, including natural objects and works of art considered as things given in the cultural world, is an object for consciousness."⁶³ Dufrenne's purpose here is to stress the priority of the perceived over the perceiving; he wishes to deny that the aesthetic object is more dependent on conscious acts than are other objects.

In part one, "Phenomenology of the Aesthetic Object," Dufrenne asks an ontological question and shifts to an epistemological one. Is the work real or unreal? And where is the locus of the art work's meaning? His response is somewhat general, but in reference to the literary aesthetic object we can speculate that phonic material is real, but the represented objects projected by the meaning units it finds are unreal. In itself, however, the aesthetic object is neither real nor unreal. Dufrenne next proposes his central thesis; "Therefore, what is irreplaceable, the very substance of the work, is the sensuous or perceptible element which is communicated only in its presence."⁶⁴ In other words, the represented object is unreal with respect to the everyday world, but is real with respect to the life of the work. In consequence, the devaluation of the represented object is inevitable. In effect, the work of art has an equivocal existence because it transcends itself toward the aesthetic object in which it attains, along with public recognition, fulness of being.⁶⁵

This interest in public recognition influences the section called "The Work and Its Performance." This section depends heavily on Ingarden's concept of concretization, which Dufrenne terms "performance." He draws upon Husserl's "qualities of manifestation," but considers them carried exclusively by the sensuous. In general, the work of art and aesthetic object reflect and are understood through one another. Performance is the means by which one becomes the other. Dufrenne also insists on performative fidelity to the art work, but adds that "we do have to grant a truth of the work which is independent of its performance or anterior to it."⁶⁶

Later Dufrenne considers the characteristics of the literary work: "What characterizes the literary work and opposes it to ordinary writing is the fact that the signification is given in the word."⁶⁷ What is aesthetic in the literary work derives from the means of representation which it brings into play and on which the represented object depends--the choice and arrangement of the words. In establishing these parameters, Dufrenne recalls Schleiermacher as well as Husserl. He also comes close to identifying meaning with the mutual implication of subject and object. He withdraws from this position, however, and establishes himself as a realist in his ontological analysis of the work of art (Part Two), of which the fourth chapter, "The Structure of the Work of Art in General," presents material relevant to literature as well as the other arts. Briefly stated, the three aspects of structure Dufrenne discusses are matter, subject, and expression. Matter is that which constitutes the sensuous nature of art, for example, the spoken word. Subject is the "represented object" signified by the sensuous. Expression is "the author's affectivity embodied

in the sensuousity of the work," and is marked by its special "depth": the aesthetic object offers a "plurality of meanings which are not juxtaposed but, rather, superimposed on each other hierarchically."⁶⁸ Thus ambiguity is possible in interpretation. Dufrenne then borrows a thesis familiar to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty when he says that expression is a pre-reflective project of the universe and of the self. And finally he displays his affinity with the Geneva critics when he claims that the reader's "comprehension of the work consists in a dialogue" which one takes up with the work's creator.⁶⁹

One other point deserves some attention for the light it sheds on reader-response criticism: Dufrenne's general theory of perception. He distinguishes among three successive moments of perception--presence, representation, and reflection. These moments parallel the three aspects of the aesthetic object--the sensuous, the represented object, and the expressed world. Dufrenne then substitutes "feeling" for "reflection" as better able to detect the expressed world. He maintains that "the object is meaningful by itself, bearing its meaning within itself, before the relation constitutive of signification is shown and made explicit."⁷⁰ Meaning is not bestowed by an act of consciousness, although the author's "sense" limits meaning. In effect, "the relationship between creator and spectator first manifests itself, through the indeterminacy of the work, as a sort of corporeal complexity--which may be the case in all human relations."⁷¹

Conclusion

The divergent channels I have attempted to chart in this chapter run swift and deep, and it might be objected that the result is inadequate. I respond that for my purpose--an overview of phenomenology

relevant to its use in interpretation--this synopsis is necessary and sufficient. The relationship between the Geneva critics and the aestheticians provides a contrast conducing to practical criticism. The Geneva critics' belief that literature incarnates reality is based on a presupposition that man's ability to create and use language defines him. Language is used to its fullest potential in literature for two reasons: the author is endowed with the power to understand and use speech, and he or she manipulates whole structures of language in the work.⁷² As Miller points out, the work of the Geneva critics comprises a consciousness of consciousness informed by various concepts appropriated from Husserl and other precursors. Ingarden and Dufrenne borrow some of the same ideas, but they produce what might aptly be termed analysis of consciousness. Whereas the Geneva critics interpret specific works and authors, Ingarden and Dufrenne construct theories regarding the literary work in general, as well as its perception. Another distinction involves the respective foci of their projects: while the Geneva critics are principally interested in the intersubjective dimension of criticism, that is, the exchange of views between text and reader, the ontological critics are more interested in the basis for identifying a literary text. Notwithstanding these divergent purposes, however, both approaches share the phenomenological methodology.

We can conclude this chapter by asking a question which has been deferred since the opening: Why should literature be considered phenomenologically? The answer must be founded on a humanistic presupposition--if we view literature as an expression of lived experience, and as such possessed of meaning in the world of experience, then

a phenomenological analysis will enlarge and restructure experience.

As Merleau-Ponty observes:

The process of expression, when it is successful, does not merely leave for the reader and the writer himself a kind of reminder, it brings the meaning into existence as a thing at the very heart of the text, it brings it to life in an organism of words, establishing it in the writer or the reader as a new sense organ, opening a new field or a new dimension to our experience.⁷³

In other words, the work of literature, when successful, draws the reader along to a new vantage point from which to experience the world. Each work can create a new perspective for perceiving life. The reader's sense of belonging to the life-world expands--he or she is exposed to others' thoughts and experiences. The reader thus ceases to consider himself or herself as detached from humanity, but instead as intimately related to it. If one interprets the phenomenological approach as an attempt to integrate experience for humanity, then literature, as an artistic, expressive endeavor of humanity, needs to be considered in a phenomenological light.

NOTES

¹ Dagobert D. Runes, ed., Dictionary of Philosophy (New York: Philosophical Library, 1960), p. 231.

² György M. Vajda, "Phenomenology and Literary Criticism," in Literature and Its Interpretation, ed. Lajos Nyíró (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979), p. 168.

- 3 Vajda, p. 204.
- 4 Robert R. Magliola, Phenomenology and Literature (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1977), p. 3.
- 5 Magliola, p. 3.
- 6 Magliola, p. 4.
- 7 Edmund Husserl, Ideas, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Collier Books, 1975), p. 97.
- 8 Husserl, p. 100.
- 9 Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 68.
- 10 Husserl, p. 100.
- 11 Magliola, p. 5.
- 12 Lentricchia, p. 81.
- 13 Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. Macquarrie and Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 67-68.
- 14 Lentricchia, p. 85.
- 15 Lentricchia, p. 89.
- 16 Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971), p. 36.
- 17 Lentricchia, p. 92.
- 18 Magliola, p. 8.
- 19 Lentricchia, p. 45.
- 20 Magliola, p. 11.
- 21 quoted in Magliola, p. 11.
- 22 Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Citadel Press, 1964), p. xlvii.
- 23 Lentricchia, pp. 47-48.
- 24 Lentricchia, p. 79.
- 25 Magliola, p. 13.
- 26 Magliola, p. 13.

- 27 Magliola, p. 19.
- 28 Magliola, p. 19.
- 29 Sarah N. Lawall, Critics of Consciousness (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 3.
- 30 Magliola, p. 20.
- 31 J. Hillis Miller, "The Geneva School," Critical Quarterly, Winter (1966), 308.
- 32 Magliola, p. 20.
- 33 Miller, 310-311.
- 34 Magliola, p. 21.
- 35 Miller, 313.
- 36 Miller, 313-314.
- 37 Miller, 315.
- 38 quoted in Magliola, p. 22.
- 39 quoted in Magliola, p. 22.
- 40 Miller, 315.
- 41 quoted in Lawall, pp. 125-126.
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- 69 Dufrenne, p. 326.
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CHAPTER 3
READER-RESPONSE AND
RECEPTION THEORY

Principles of Reader-Response Criticism

In her introduction to Reader-Response Criticism, Jane Tompkins characterizes this approach; it is "not a conceptually unified critical position, but a term that has come to be associated with the work of critics who use the words reader, the reading process, and response to mark out an area for investigation."¹ She identifies this method as one opposed to the "Affective Fallacy," formulated as a dictum of the New Criticism by Wimsatt and Beardsley. Instead of avoiding the psychological effects of the poem on the reader, reader-response criticism embraces the doctrine that a poem cannot be understood apart from its effect on the reader. In fact, the poem's effects, "psychological and otherwise, are essential to any accurate description of its meaning, since that meaning has no effective existence outside of its realization in the mind of a reader."² The underlying assumption of the reader-response approach is that discussion of a text is meaningless if it ignores the audience who receives the text; someone must read the work in order for it to be fully actualized.

Because reader-response criticism is not a "conceptually unified critical position," it encompasses a variety of theoretical orientations which shape its definitions of the reader, of interpretation, and of the text. Tompkins identifies these orientations as New Criticism, structuralism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and

deconstruction. She claims, moreover, that when viewed with certain issues in mind, the various orientations follow a coherent progression and point toward a new understanding of discourse. The principal issue is the status of the literary text--the objectivity of the text is discarded as an illusion because the conceptual distinction between texts and readers is reorganized. Furthermore, as the reader is emphasized, the aims and methods of literary study are redefined to account for the newly-formulated authority of the reader. "What began as a small shift of emphasis from the narrator implied by a literary work to the reader it implies ends by becoming an exchange of world-views."³ This exchange of world views grounds some reader-response criticism in phenomenology; this relation is to some degree evident in the work of Stanley Fish, and is most evident in the works of Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss. (In focusing on these critics I realize that I am setting to one side such critics as Norman Holland and David Bleich, who might be called "radical subjectivists," but in my view their theories allow too much latitude in interpretation.) In addition to these critics, I shall also consider Gadamer once again; although he is not, strictly speaking, a reader-response theorist, Gadamer does share with Jauss an interest in the historical consciousness of the reader and its role in determining the reader's response.

In general, although theorists of reader-oriented criticism disagree on various issues, they are united in their opposition to the belief "that meaning inheres completely and exclusively in the literary text."⁴ However, Tompkins suggests that instead of revolutionizing literary theory, reader-response critics have merely "transposed" formalist principles into a new key. For example, although New Critics

and reader-oriented critics locate meaning in different places, both schools assume that their ultimate goal is to specify meaning.⁵ This basic hermeneutic assumption is actually a reaction against the nineteenth-century deification of poetry which presumed that poetry excites the reader. In contrast, the perceived function of poetry at the beginning of the twentieth century was to induce in the reader a sense of equilibrium, of order; I. A. Richards codified this view, asserting that poetry is capable of inducing this sense in the reader because it is an ordering force and the embodiment of order. Thus the concern shifts to the form of the literary text as a vehicle for the organization of a world in confusion. This belief is founded on the conviction that "poetry must be detached from the world in order to save it."⁶ Yet twentieth-century formalism takes this position further by conceiving of poetry as a means for neutralizing feelings, not just purifying and refining them. The end result is a criticism, such as T. S. Eliot promotes, which repudiates affect and removes literature from its historical circumstances altogether.

Despite Tompkins' identification of similarities in origin between formalism and reader-response criticism, I believe that the issue of historical consciousness is a major obstacle to any further comparison. While formalism is avowedly ahistorical, reader-response criticism is often profoundly historical in that it requires the reader to interpret and evaluate the text relative to his or her own historical position. Readers must adopt a position if they are to interpret the work significantly, and to a degree all reading is interpretation. As a consequence of historical consciousness, readers enter into a dialogue with the work, as the proponents of hermeneutics recommend.

This process is described in greater detail by the critics we shall consider in this chapter. Fish and Iser are chiefly interested in defining the process whereby the reader and the work interact; Gadamer and Jauss are principally interested in defining the limits of historical consciousness, an awareness which underlies the process Fish and Iser discuss.

Stanley Fish(es) for Readers

Stanley Fish is a particularly difficult critic to characterize, largely because his critical position keeps changing. His early work is, in a broad sense, formalist, but over the years his theory has evolved. He reflexively describes his shift in critical activity in these terms:

The business of criticism . . . [is] not to decide between interpretations by subjecting them to the test of disinterested evidence but to establish by political and persuasive means (they are the same thing) the set of interpretive assumptions from the vantage of which the evidence (and the facts and the intentions and everything else) will hereafter be specifiable.⁷

As an early proponent of reader-response criticism, then, Fish proposed a method of literary analysis which accounted for the reader as an actively mediating presence, and was concerned with the "psychological effects" of the text. Such is his focus in early works like Surprised by Sin and Self-Consuming Artifacts. His focus in later essays appears to be based on certain assumptions which have become presuppositions for Fish. First, he assumes that the recognition of formal features and meaning in the work is controlled by "interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader."⁸ Related to this assumption is an even more basic presupposition, one that can be

traced throughout Fish's criticism: an absolutely objective interpretation is impossible, for one always approaches a text with certain attitudes or expectations which determine response. When Fish asserts that "there is no single way of reading that is correct or natural," he asserts the unavoidable pluralism of interpretations.

Although Fish's methodology is rigorously analytical, his aims can be viewed as oriented toward phenomenology, for he implies that understanding a text is a collaboration, a collusion, between the reader and the text. In his early work he argues that certain stylistic devices and theories would seem to elicit an active response from the reader. But in his more current works Fish asserts that the devices are not "already-in" the text; the reader puts them there by recognizing them, and recognizes them because the interpretive community to which one belongs has taught the reader to look for those devices. Seek, and ye shall find. However, before we become confused by Fish's changing focus, let us attempt to trace his development as a reader-oriented critic. Ultimately, Fish is useful, for his rigor lends vitality to the sometimes flabby, abstruse world of literary interpretation. If we consider him as a complement rather than an alternative to the theories of Iser and Jauss, we shall find him valuable in establishing an historical theory of interpretation.

In one of his earliest works, Surprised by Sin, Fish emphasizes the role played by the author in provoking certain responses from readers and thus compelling them to make certain judgements which constitute the text's meaning. In discussing Paradise Lost, Fish proposes that "Milton consciously wants to worry the reader, to force him to doubt the correctness of his response, and to bring him to the

realization that his inability to read the poem with any confidence in his own perception is its focus."⁹ According to Fish, Milton accomplishes this task by using certain rhetorical devices and structures which encourage the reader to misinterpret the text, whereupon Milton provides the correct interpretation. The modern reader of Paradise Lost, caught in this net of rhetoric, will supposedly encounter the same frustration as the seventeenth-century reader and, according to Fish, will arrive at the same kind of interpretation. Such a process constitutes the kind of historical consciousness which we may presume Hirsch would find acceptable.

Fish himself embraces the label of "radical" historicity, at least early in his career, but the sense in which he uses it differs somewhat from the sense in which Hirsch applies it to Gadamer:

In its operation, my method will obviously be radically historical. The critic has the responsibility of becoming not one but a number of informed readers, each of whom will be identified by a matrix of political, cultural, and literary determinants. The informed reader of Milton will not be the informed reader of Whitman, although the latter will necessarily comprehend the former. This plurality of informed readers implies a plurality of informed reader aesthetics, or no aesthetic at all.¹⁰

This statement on plurality has disturbed some critics. For example, Lentricchia objects that Fish's emphasis on the "structure of the reader's experience" leads to "radical indeterminacy." Fish addresses such objections in his essay "Interpreting the Variorum," in which he shifts his emphasis from the individual reader's experience to a community of readers that determines interpretive strategies. Interpretive communities "are made up of those who share interpretive

strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions."¹¹ A community is composed of "informed or at-home" readers; such readers are really the set of all relevant syntactic and semantic competencies. However, the existence of such a community is no guarantee of determinate interpretation: "In other words interpretive communities are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned."¹² In this view, the good reader is the one who manipulates strategies of reading now in fashion.

Lentricchia raises two further objections to Fish's critical position. First, he argues that "Fish's reader is purely literary: his membership in a community of literary critics somehow cancels out the forces that shape his political, social, or ethnic status."¹³ He goes on to suggest that any reader-oriented theory which refuses to assess the influence of nonliterary affiliations is drastically incomplete. Lentricchia may be rather unfair in this criticism; nowhere does Fish specifically dismiss the consequences of membership in non-literary communities. Is it not possible that such communities are satellites of certain literary communities, or vice versa, as Fish implies in a later essay? As Gadamer demonstrates in Truth and Method, we can never escape certain prejudices and prejudgements which will determine how we examine a work. This observation does not contradict Fish; indeed, he implies the same thing when he writes that "interpretive strategies . . . are the shape of reading, and because they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as it is usually assumed, arising from them."¹⁴ In short, the

kind of training one has, and the kinds of expectations one has as a result of nonliterary affiliations, equip the reader with interpretive strategies which lead the reader to ask certain questions of the work, thus guiding the interpretation in an undeniably political fashion.

Lentricchia's second objection is a little more difficult to refute. He remarks that "it is not the case that the only alternative to naive realism or objectivism is Fish's brand of intersubjective idealism, which not only denies the objectivity of knowledge in the absolute sense of the term 'objective,' but also appears to deny that there is anything to be interpreted."¹⁵ He then asks whether the various genres are supposed to elicit the same kind of critical response. The problem for Lentricchia seems to be the imagined homogeneity of response to works by authors as diverse as Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Joyce. "The vast and varied past of cultural and authorial intention is collapsed into the single identity of what Fish calls the contemporary conditions of utterance."¹⁶ This concern is legitimate, but Fish himself asserts in his essay "Literature in the Reader" that homogeneity of critical approach does not necessitate homogeneity of interpretation. Perhaps Fish's theory forbids any inquiry into the historical process "which deposits countless traces of the past on that putatively enclosed environment called 'contemporary conditions of utterance.'"¹⁷ But even if it does, does that mean the reader must choose between Wordsworth and Fish as poets of self-expression? Furthermore, this objection can be dissolved if one recalls Weinsheimer's hermeneutic position, cited in Chapter 1, that all reading is interpretation, and all interpretation application. Fish's most recent analysis of interpretation can provide some defense against Lentricchia's critical assault.

Fish certainly embraces the idea that all reading is interpretation; almost every essay of the last ten years contains the litany which echoes his hermeneutic belief that communication is possible because a way of thinking, a form of life, implicates readers in a world of objects, purposes, goals. Furthermore, "communication occurs within situations . . . to be in a situation is already to be in possession of (or to be possessed by) a structure of assumptions, of practices understood to be relevant in relation to purposes and goals that are already in place."¹⁸ Fish concludes that "since everyone is situated somewhere, there is no one for whom the absence of an situational norm would be of any practical consequence, in the sense that his performance or his confidence in his ability to perform would be impaired . . . In other words, while relativism is a position one can entertain, it is not a position one can occupy."¹⁹ In a later essay Fish considers the philosophical implications of this interpretive situation on the problem of solipsism. Because the interpretive community expands its influence,

it follows, then, that the fear of solipsism, of the imposition by the unconstrained self of its own prejudices, is unfounded because the self does not exist apart from the communal or conventional categories of thought that enable its operations (of thinking, seeing, reading).²⁰

By dismissing (or devaluing) the notion of the unconstrained self, Fish effectively deprives of their urgency the arguments of Hirsch and other proponents of objective interpretation. This devaluing is made possible by collapsing the traditional distinction between subjective and objective meanings: "these meanings will be neither subjective nor objective . . . they will not be objective because

they will always have been the product of a point of view rather than having been simply "read off"; and they will not be subjective because that point of view will always be social or institutional."²¹

What follows from Fish's collapsing of distinction between subjective and objective meanings is a view of interpretation as "the only game in town." If interpretation is unavoidable, then we need not be concerned with the question of constraints":

The mistake is to think of interpretation as an activity in need of constraints, when in fact interpretation is a structure of constraints. The field interpretation covers comes complete with its own internal set of rules and regulations, its list of prescribed activities which is also, and at the same time, a list of activities that are proscribed.²²

Fish moves from this pronouncement to consider skepticism and the manner in which interpretation constrains it. He argues that radical skepticism is impossible because the mind is composed of categories of understanding, and "there is no possibility of achieving the distance from them that would make them available to a skeptical inquiry."²³ Fish's conclusion, which he has implied or stated outright in all his criticism, is that interpretation can be a political activity inasmuch as it is "an attempt on the part of one party to alter the beliefs of another so that the evidence cited by the first will be seen as evidence by the second."²⁴ In other words, one party attempts to persuade another party to join a particular interpretive community.

A drastically simplified examination of Fish's development reveals certain marked congruencies between stages of his emerging theory and the concerns of hermenutics and phenomenology. In the beginning, his attention to the effect of the text on the reader situates him in the

area of formal hermeneutics--notably in his emphasis on the reader's recreation of psychological processes manipulated by the author. Later, in attempting to validate this response, he introduces the idea of an interpretive community, in which the informed reader is "at-home," and which guides the reader's responses. In the process he devalues the author and replaces the author with the community of informed readers as the source of meaning. The reader continues to engage the text in a dialogue, but any outcome at any time is determined. Finally, Fish commits himself to a revisionist hermeneutic position when he concludes that the power of the community is not oppressive because it is irresistible; controlled interpretation is neither good nor bad, for it is "the only game in town." Certainly Fish's theories are convincing, although one might object that they are too glib. Still, much of what Fish says about the authority of interpretive communities and the inevitability of interpretation is consistent with hermeneutic inquiry, but can be more helpful if tempered with the theories of Iser, Gadamer, and Jauss.

Iser a Text in This Class?

The next proponent of the reader-response approach to criticism I wish to discuss, Wolfgang Iser, does not attempt to revise the historical situation of the reader, fixing the reader as Fish does in the "now" of the interpretive community. Instead, Iser considers the times of both the reader and the author. Moreover, "Iser's theory of reading attempts to revise the [traditional subject-object] model itself; subject and object are coordinates within the integrated medium of what Husserl defines as intentional consciousness."²⁵ In fact, Iser is phenomenological in several respects, and he subtitles his chapter on

the reading process in The Implied Reader "a phenomenological approach." In this chapter he concurs with Fish that "a literary text must be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative."²⁶ However, while Fish in his later works is chiefly interested with the priority and power of interpretive communities in determining interpretive strategies, Iser shows an affinity with Fish's earlier work by looking closely at the actual reading process and the way a text provokes a response:

The written text imposes certain limits on its unwritten implications in order to prevent these from becoming too blurred and hazy, but at the same time these implications, worked out by the reader's imagination, set the given situation against a background which endows it with far greater significance than it might have seemed to possess on its own.²⁷

Thus Iser's approach is oriented more toward the power of the text than to the power of forces outside the text.

From this position Iser proceeds to a phenomenological analysis of the reading process. His analysis is influenced heavily by Ingarden's The Literary Work of Art, and Iser begins by examining the way in which sequential sentences act upon one another, since literary texts "do not correspond to any objective reality outside themselves."²⁸ He then observes that "the sentence does not consist solely of a statement . . . but aims at something beyond what it actually says." Moreover, "the individual sentences not only work together to shade in what is to come; they also form an expectation in this regard." Yet these expectations are scarcely ever fulfilled in truly literary texts. Instead, "each intentional sentence correlative opens up a particular horizon, which is modified, if not completely changed, by succeeding sentences."

The ensuing intersection of past, present, and future results in a "multiplicity of connections" which enables the reader to "recreate" the world the literary texts presents.²⁹ This recreation is not absolute in Schleiermacher's sense; rather, it produces a text endowed with reality in the phenomenological sense.

Iser next investigates the phenomenon of disappointment in relation to anticipation and retrospection: "The process of anticipation and retrospection itself does not by any means develop in a smooth flow." He explains Ingarden's view of a "blockage in the stream of thought" and the subsequent response of surprise or indignation. Unlike Ingarden, who regards such a lacuna as a product of chance, Iser asserts that "literary texts are full of unexpected twists and turns, and frustration of expectations." He further contends that "it is only through inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism," thus revealing an attitude toward the text roughly equivalent to Heidegger's attitude toward tools in his theory of equipmentality. Only when gaps occur does the reader fully realize that "one text is potentially capable of several different realizations," a possibility that we shall explore in the second half of this inquiry. Moreover, this experience is similar to the way in which one gathers experience in life; "thus the 'reality' of the reading experience can illuminate basic patterns of real experience."³⁰ In this respect Iser's analysis of the reading experience is akin to Merleau-Ponty's evaluation of the world as a text, an "open totality the synthesis of which is inexhaustible."³¹

The process of recreating the text, then, relies on interruptions which are not accidental. Instead, Iser asserts that the process is steered by two textual components: "first, a repertoire of familiar

literary patterns and recurrent literary themes, together with allusions to familiar social and historical contexts; second, techniques or strategies used to set the familiar against the unfamiliar." Here Iser seems to presume a readership composed of Fish's "informed" readers. Again, though, he emphasizes the effect rather than the authority when he writes, "this defamiliarization of what the reader thought he recognized is bound to create a tension that will intensify his expectations as well as his distrust of those expectations."³² From this position Iser generalizes that the usefulness of literary criticism is that it makes conscious those aspects of the text which would otherwise remain hidden--namely,*those aspects which evoke and then negate what is familiar. By extension, a new historical consciousness emerges:

Once the reader is entangled, his own preconceptions are continually overtaken, so that the text becomes his 'present' while his own ideas fade into the 'past'; as soon as this happens he is open to the immediate experience of the text, which was impossible so long as his preconceptions were his 'present.'³³

Iser's characterization of this process resituates the reader in temporal relation to the text in a manner different from that of Fish, and in a manner of which Hirsch would not approve. Iser is more phenomenological in that the text becomes a presence, and his theories will be effectively complemented by the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Jauss.

In The Act of Reading, Iser more completely develops the phenomenological dimension of his theory, but he also deemphasizes its phenomenological character by incorporating it into a more generalized theory of reception. Most notably, he expands his use of Ingarden and the

theory of "gaps of indeterminacy." When he writes of the rudiments of an aesthetic theory, for example, Iser refers to the text offering "schematized aspects" which must be "concretized" by the reader to give the work meaning, an idea originated by Ingarden.³⁴ The schematized aspects include historical context, and Iser emphasizes this connection when he observes that "the historical qualities which influenced the author at the time of writing mould the image of the intended reader."³⁵ Iser's theory recognizes that the text commands or compels the reader to move into a history that is more than a repetition of contemporary conditions. The text accomplishes this task by offering "schematized" views and imposing "certain limits on its unwritten implications." But for all these determinate characteristics, the text is also partially indeterminate: it has the gaps of indeterminacy which the reader needs to fill in.

Iser's theory of gaps is particularly useful in analyzing the process of reading, and it fills in some areas which Fish has left vague. In assessing this accomplishment, Lentricchia criticizes Iser for abandoning his phenomenology in favor of the conventional subject-object model and hedonistic values.³⁶ Again, I think Lentricchia misses the point. Yes, Iser does speak in terms of subject and object, but he avoids implying a dualism. He observes that "it is the gaps, the fundamental asymmetry between text and reader, that give rise to communication in the reading process."³⁷ As happens in Heideggerian gaps in equipmentality, Iser's gaps serve to make readers self-conscious about their activity and their interpretive dilemma. Iser calls attention to the result of this variation on a defamiliarization when he claims that "this involvement, or entanglement, is what places

us in the 'presentness' of the text and what makes the text a presence for us."³⁸ The indeterminacy of the text, then, brought about by inversions of the familiar, contributes to the historical posture that the interpreter adopts toward the text, a posture which prevents any absolute bifurcation of subject and object.

The gaps of indeterminacy of which Iser writes can be divided into two basic structures--blanks and negations. Blanks designate "a vacancy in the overall system of the text, the filling of which brings about an interaction of textual patterns . . . They point up the difference between literary and everyday use of language."³⁹ Related to blanks are vacancies, which refer to nonthematic segments within the text; they are "important guiding devices for building up the aesthetic object, because they condition the reader's view of the new theme, which in turn conditions his view of previous themes."⁴⁰ This process is similar to that which Fish analyzes in Surprised by Sin when he discusses disappointment and subsequent revision of expectation by the reader. Usually these vacancies call into question an original interpretation: "the reader's attention is now fixed not upon what the norms represent, but upon what the representation excludes, and so the aesthetic object . . . begins to arise out of what is adumbrated by the negated possibilities."⁴¹

Iser next speaks of blanks as the products of "dense interweaving of perspectives, which causes a rapid and continual switch from theme to horizon," but he also tries to demonstrate "what happens to the contents incorporated in the various textual perspectives whenever they are subjected to the switching viewpoint in the theme and horizon structure." In order to explain this kind of indeterminacy along the

paradigmatic axis of the text, Iser introduces the concept of negation, in which the repertoire of the text--its historical and social norms--is defamiliarized. Then the reader encounters the familiar as obsolescent--"it belongs to the 'past,' and [the reader] is suddenly moved into a position beyond it without having any command of this new situation . . . The process of negation therefore situates the reader halfway between a 'no longer' and a 'not yet.'" ⁴² The result of this process is a continual erosion of position so that readers must reassess their attitudes vis-à-vis the literary work, thus enlarging and restructuring experience. Iser's belief in the inevitability of this process identifies him as a rather traditional humanist.

The blanks and negations denote missing links along the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes of the work, simultaneously making possible a resolution of asymmetry between reader and text. "Blanks and negations increase the density of fictional texts, for their omissions and cancellations indicate that practically all the formulations of the text refer to an unformulated background, and so the formulated text has a kind of unformulated double"--negativity. ⁴³ This negativity has three features. First, "negativity makes possible the comprehension which comes about through the constitutive acts of the reading process"; this feature occurs because the negativity functions as a link between the individual positions of the text. The second feature relates to content; "negations may revoke, modify, or neutralize the knowledge presented or invoked by the repertoire, or they may simply relegate it to the background." Thus expectations are thwarted, and the reader is confronted with the question of cause. This kind of negativity denotes a deficiency of knowledge and so calls its validity into question, and

by examining cause, "meaning thus emerges as the reverse side of what the text has depicted." The third feature of negativity has to do with communication: since literature cannot be manifested under the same conditions pertaining to familiar existing conceptions of reality, it communicates through the "dislocation of external norms from their real context, and through draining these norms of their reality."⁴⁴ Iser concludes his discussion of negativity by considering its influence on meaning, which he characterizes as aesthetic in nature:

[Meaning] does not arise solely from the fact that there are many different possibilities from which we choose one and exclude the rest, but also from the fact that there is no frame of reference to offer criteria of right or wrong. This does not imply that the meaning must, consequently, be purely subjective; although it requires the subject to produce and experience it, the very existence of alternatives makes it necessary for meaning to be defensible and so intersubjectively accessible.⁴⁵

For Iser, then, meaning may not be determinate, but it is intersubjective, thus suggesting an historical perspective which makes intersubjective communication possible. It remains for a philosopher such as Gadamer to examine such an historical perspective, and for a literary historian such as Jauss to apply that perspective to literary hermeneutics.

Truth and Method:
Gadamer's Strange Bedfellows

The most ambitious effort to recover historical consciousness for textual interpretations is Gadamer's Truth and Method. He concurs with Heidegger that all understanding is a process of forestructuring, and thus must confront this primary question: "What is the special virtue of the historical consciousness--as against all other forms of

consciousness in history--that its own relativity does not destroy the fundamental claim to be objective knowledge?"⁴⁶ The answer Gadamer provides is one which phenomenologists imply but seldom demonstrate: history is not a closed, completed, and foreign object from which the reader stands detached. Rather, as in the Hegelian model, history is an ongoing and encompassing process. To state the situation in Heideggerian terms, history is lived experience, and Gadamer echoes Heidegger's figurative language when he resorts to metaphors of a hugely inclusive totality, of a ceaseless river, of a nourishing earth, in order to suggest the reciprocal involvement of past and present. He writes that "history is not only not completed, but we stand within it as one understanding, as a conditioned, finite link in a continuing chain"⁴⁷ Later he observes that "understanding is not to be thought of so much as an action of one's subjectivity, but as the placing of oneself within a process of interpretation, in which past and present are constantly fused."⁴⁸ Finally, he remarks:

Time is no longer a gulf to be bridged, because it separates, but it is actually the supportive ground of process in which the present is rooted . . . [Time] is not a yawning abyss, but it is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which all that is handed down presents itself to us.⁴⁹

It is this awareness of time that provides a crucial, although not conscious, refinement to the reader-response theories of Fish and Iser.

The acquisition of an authentic historical understanding is not easy, and Gadamer suggests its difficulty in a series of remarks which set strangeness and difference against the continuity of custom and tradition. For example, how do we discover that there is a difference between our own customary use of language and that of the text? In

attempting to answer this question, Gadamer distinguishes between foremeanings and arbitrary fancies. Foremeanings are recognized after rigorous self-examination which helps historical consciousness recognize itself and bring the reader into the truth of the text. Arbitrary fancies, on the other hand, are products of limitations imposed on the reader by the imperceptible habits of thought. Since readers always labor under these hidden prejudices, Gadamer's recognition serves as a revelation of bias so that the text may assert its own truth. Yet even if one achieves the self-consciousness of foremeaning, the reader has not thereby attained an objective position, for the reader continues to exist and function within a situation which prevents scientific certainty—to exist historically means that self-understanding can never be complete. Similarly, knowledge of a work can never be complete.

Gadamer appears to use terms like "history," "foremeaning," and "prejudice" in two senses. In one sense, there is a persistent and massive flux which characterizes authentic historical time—tradition. In a second sense, there are inconstant, brief-lived tributaries—arbitrary fancies and illegitimate prejudices—which the historical consciousness frequently confuses with the mainstream. The concepts of authority and tradition seem to require more acute examination than Gadamer conducts, yet in his fashion Gadamer does probe them. He argues that authority is neither irrational nor arbitrary, but becomes instead, as a ground of legitimate prejudices, a source of truth. The essence of true authority, he claims, is based on "recognition and knowledge—knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgement and insight and that for this reason his judgement takes precedence, i.e. it has precedence over one's own."⁵⁰ Moving from

personal authority to the transpersonal authority of tradition, he adds:

That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that always the authority of what has been transmitted . . . has power over one's attitudes and behavior⁵¹

Ultimately, the other (embodied in the text) presents itself so much in terms of our own selves that there is no longer a question of self and other. The horizon of a given individual, in a given culture, in a given historical phase, is not closed but open, and a single horizon embraces everything contained in historical consciousness.

Gadamer also considers language as historical, but in such a way as to be the source of the historical: "There is a pre-linguistic experience of the world . . . The language of gesture, facial expression and movement binds us to each other."⁵² Here Gadamer uses "language" to mean the way a situation is encountered, the way problems are phrased, the way the future is anticipated. Language is historical insofar as it is limited to particulars. At the same time it is the essence of history, for its revealing process demands further accounts.⁵³ The further accounts lead to a dialogue which is made possible by preunderstanding extending to the participants' expectations of standpoint as well as subject matter. Since the central concern is subject matter, discourse is not made subjective by preunderstanding. Neither is the dialogue dogmatic, for preunderstanding can be brought into accord with the subject matter. If the preunderstanding is inadequate, then some degree of subjectivity introduced into the interpretation can be modified by further interpretation. Gadamer apparently has in mind as a model the Platonic dialogue, in which both participants

seek, from a standpoint of ignorance, to understand some concept. Both participants operate in a similar tradition, and so the outcome is somewhat determined. However, each has a distinct horizon from which to encounter the other through language. Understanding occurs when there is a fusion of horizons, when one horizon expands to include the other. In literature, this expansion can include horizons of the past. Of course, the context of the interpretation of the immanent text is the interpreter's context. However, the interpreter's own context is conditioned by the tradition in which he or she stands, and the text is part of this tradition. Thus the immanent text is simultaneously and paradoxically context-free and context-bound.⁵⁴

The ontology of the art work also receives some attention from Gadamer, although that attention is not as exhaustive as it is in the works of Ingarden and Dufrenne. Gadamer's ontology is closely linked to his epistemology of the aesthetic experience. He writes, "What we call a work of art and experience aesthetically depends on a process of abstraction. By disregarding everything in which a work is rooted . . . it becomes visible as the 'pure work of art.'"⁵⁵ Gadamer refers to this process as "aesthetic differentiation," and it is performed in the self-consciousness of the aesthetic experience. Yet according to Gadamer, there is no direct opposition between the aesthetic and historical attitudes; rather, the aesthetic is a moment of the hermeneutic awareness that allows the interpreter to be claimed by the art work as art. In suggesting that aesthetics has to be transformed into hermeneutics, Gadamer anticipates Jauss and implies that the philosophical task in thinking about art is to clarify the conditions for the process by which art is understood and interpreted. As Jauss will elaborate,

the process takes place in time and in an historical tradition of successive dialogues with the ark work.

Gadamer's theory is not flawless, but its flaws are shared with the theories of Fish and Iser. Specifically, Lentricchia accuses Gadamer of question-begging and of implying that reason, the foundation of knowledge, is both arbitrary and irrational, an act of power.⁵⁶ In addition, as we have seen in Chapter 1, Hirsch labels Gadamer's (and Heidegger's) style of hermeneutics "relativistic historicism." The underlying problem for these thinkers who discuss historical consciousness, particularly as it influences the reader's interpretation, seems to be the location of authority. If the reader is such an important part of the act of interpretation, and if tradition (or an interpretive community) determines how one interprets, then from what source does this tradition obtain its authority? Iser implies that there is political power hidden in tradition when he says that one function of indeterminacy is to undermine previously held beliefs and values. Fish asserts quite openly that interpretation is political. I believe the question of authority is too ominous and provocative. Tradition simply is; it is neither good nor bad. This seems to be Gadamer's understanding of tradition, and it also provides a framework for the aesthetics of reception posited by Jauss.

Jauss's Perception of Reception

Hans Robert Jauss treats many of the issues implied or addressed by the preceding figures and as a prominent member of the Konstanz school of literary studies, he occupies a unique position in relation to these other critics and thinkers. He is an associate of Iser, who has taught with him at Konstanz, and he has been instrumental in

propounding a method of interpretation called Rezeptionsästhetik (aesthetic of reception), a continental form of reader-response criticism. In addition, he is a former student of Gadamer, and so is well-versed in hermeneutic studies. Most significantly, he is a product of German scholasticism with its emphasis on historical reading, and he is principally interested in revising the conception and role of history in teaching students to interpret works of literature. Departing from the traditional methods and aims of humanistic education, represented by the work of such predecessors as Erich Auerbach and Ernst Curtius, Jauss holds that the aim of a literary education should be to endow the individual with sufficient discrimination and moral power of judgment to withstand the influence of "hidden persuaders." He argues that literature, especially past literature, has a formative social function.

While his project appears close in spirit to the ideological argument that literature should perform a social function, Jauss rejects the Marxist approach (as he rejects the formalist approach) because of its adherence to the classical creed that the canonical work is the aesthetic incarnation of a universal essence. In the first chapter of Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, titled "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," he presents a manifesto; the strength of his method arises from a refinement of the established rules for understanding literature. His principal concern is with the dynamic and dialectical process of canon formation rather than with the definition of an actual canon. He conceives of this process as dynamic and dialectical because of the audience's role as receptor. If the reader is considered as part of the reading operation, the function of a reading cannot be the establishment of some objective, determinate meaning of

a text. Instead, Jauss argues, any conception of reading must begin with the recognition that the reader is already immersed in the tradition that has given rise to the text. Jauss's focus on the reader is crucial; it is also related to the importance of historical consciousness.

A focal point for our examination of Jauss's theory might be his assertion that "literature and art only obtain a history that has the character of a process when the succession of works is mediated not only through the producing subject but also through the consuming subject--through the interaction of author and public."⁵⁷ This consuming subject of which Jauss writes is an historical subject, and its historical consciousness does not exist as a set of recorded propositions; rather, historical consciousness exists as a "horizon of expectations." This concept, appropriated from Husserl, implies that the condition of existence of a consciousness is not self-consciously available. Similarly, the "horizon of expectation" brought to a work of art is not available in objective form, neither to the author nor to its contemporaries or later recipients. But the "horizon of expectation" does mediate between the private inception and the public reception of the work.

Jauss's project of reviving literary history is informed by a reliance on the hermeneutics of question and answer. The reader must continually ask what is familiar or unfamiliar to the horizon of expectation. Of course the work also asks these questions, and so the dialogue persists with the reader constantly revising his or her critical understanding. Here Jauss draws upon Gadamer in asserting that such a dialogue presupposes that its participants share a common concern and

are not merely intent upon one another. Consequently, the interpreter must not concentrate on the text but rather must adopt an orientation toward the problem that concerns the text, and address the problem along with the text. The process of individual interpretation is grounded in the theory that the hermeneutic activity is to be conceived "as a unity of the three moments of understanding (intelligere), interpretation (interpretare), and application (applicare)."⁵⁸ Jauss credits Gadamer with having brought back to light the significance of this triadic unity. Jauss's chief contribution to this renaissance is the rigorously systematic method he constructs in the form of theses which address the question of how literary history can be rewritten.

The first thesis establishes the historical nature of Jauss's project: "A renewal of literary history demands the removal of the prejudices of historical objectivism and the grounding of the traditional aesthetics of production and representation in an aesthetics of reception and influence." He bases this assertion on the belief (influenced by R. G. Collingwood's view of history as "nothing but the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's mind") that a literary work is not fixed and isolated. "It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence. It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers and that frees the text from the material of the words and brings it to a contemporary existence." He then concludes that "history of literature is a process of aesthetic reception and production that takes place in the realization of literary texts on the part of the receptive reader, the reflective critic, and the author in his continuing productivity."⁵⁹ In short, literature's coherence as an event is mediated in the horizon of

expectation of the literary experience of readers, contemporary and later, critics, and authors.

Jauss's second thesis asserts that analysis of the reader's literary experience avoids psychologism on the condition that it satisfies the following qualifications:

if it describes the reception and the influence of a work within the objectifiable system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance, from a preunderstanding of the genre, from the form and themes of already familiar works, and from the opposition between poetic and practical language.⁶⁰

This claim is founded on the belief, affirmed by Heidegger and Gadamer, that foreknowledge is an element of experience itself. No work presents itself as something absolutely new, but predisposes its audience to a kind of reception by covert and overt signals, familiar characteristics, or allusions. Moreover, the reception of a text always presuppose the context of experience of aesthetic perception; in other words, knowing that a text is literary determines the kind of questions we ask of it, and knowing what kind of literary work it is will further determine the kinds of questions we ask. According to Jauss, the ideal case is the work that evokes the reader's horizon of expectation only in order to destroy it.

The third thesis claims that "the horizon of expectations of a work allows one to determine its artistic character by the kind and the degree of its influence on a presupposed audience."⁶¹ Jauss clarifies this thesis by explaining that aesthetic distance (the disparity separating the given horizon of expectation and the appearance of a work which alters that horizon) can be objectified historically along the

spectrum of the audience's reactions and criticism's judgement. As an example, Jauss discusses the publication in 1857 of Flaubert's Madame Bovary and Feydeau's Fanny. Both novels met the thematic expectations of an audience that had forsworn romanticism, and both authors understood how to revive the ossified ménage à trois relationship. How, then, do we explain Madame Bovary's notoreity and Fanny's brief popularity followed by obscurity? Jauss explains that the effect of their narrative forms holds the key. Flaubert's principle of "impersonal narration" must have shocked the same audience who read the provocative contents of Fanny couched in the moralistic tone of a confessional novel. Only after Madame Bovary was appropriated by a small circle of connoisseurs as a turning-point in the history of the novel did it become a success. Then the wider audience of novel-readers was formed by it and sanctioned a new canon of expectations.

In his fourth thesis Jauss addresses the dialogical relationship of interpreter to text: "The reconstruction of the horizon of expectations, in the face of which a work was created and received in the past, enables one on the other hand to pose questions that the text gave an answer to, and thereby to discover how the contemporary reader could have viewed and understood the work."⁶² This method of historical reception differs from that promoted by Hirsch in that it focuses on the active role of the reader in actualizing the text's meaning; the method is comparable to Fish's early practice of affective stylistics. Jauss then draws on Gadamer to explain how his method can extend to the horizon of the present: the accumulated judgement of other readers is "the successive unfolding of the potential for meaning that is embedded in a work and actualized in the stages of its historical reception as it

discloses itself to understanding judgement, so long as this faculty achieves in a controlled fashion the 'fusion of horizons' in the encounter with the tradition."⁶³ In effect, Jauss concludes, the tradition of art presupposes a dialogical exchange, in the form of question and answer, between the present and the past.

The fifth thesis moves us beyond the individual work to consideration of literary experience in general: "The theory of the aesthetics of reception not only allows one to conceive the meaning and form of a literary work in the historical unfolding of its understanding. It also demands that one insert the individual work into its 'literary series' to recognize its historical position and significance in the context of the experience of literature." Here Jauss displays an affinity with the Russian formalists and their determination to "discover the evolutionary alternating relationship of functions and forms." He explains the emergence of new forms as a process in which thematic problems left behind by old forms are answered. He is careful to remark that this process is possible only if the interpreter brings "his own experience into play, since the past horizon of old and new forms, problems and solutions, is only recognizable in its further mediation, within the present horizon of the received work."⁶⁴ A unique by-product of this process is that the actualization of a new form allows one to appreciate anew a misunderstood old form. In this sense the new is an historical category, not just an aesthetic one.

In the sixth thesis, Jauss connects his project with the work of the Prague structuralists: "The achievements made in linguistics through the distinction and methodological interrelation of diachronic and synchronic analysis are the occasion for overcoming the diachronic

perspective . . . in literary history as well." Essentially, Jauss observes that genres develop at different moments, that the development of literature does not proceed in an exclusively linear fashion. He concludes that "the historicity of literature comes to light at the intersections of diachrony and synchrony."⁶⁵ The implication for pedagogy is that selecting what works are important for a new history of literature--one which is neither great-books oriented nor totally ahistorical--depends on the literary historian finding points of intersection at which works articulate the reformulation of social and aesthetic values.

Jauss's final thesis concludes his manifesto for a new conception of literary history by providing a justification for this entire enterprise: "The social function of literature manifests itself in its genuine possibility only where the literary experience of the reader enters into the horizon of expectations of his lived praxis, preforms his understanding of the world, and thereby also has an effect on his social behavior."⁶⁶ This functional connection between literature and society does not presume literature to have a mimetic function; rather, it reshapes perceptions. Herein lies the humanistic dimension of Jauss's project:

The experience of reading can liberate one from adaptations, prejudices, and predicaments of a lived praxis in that it compels one to a new perception of things. The horizon of expectations of literature distinguishes itself before the horizon of expectations of historical lived praxis in that it not only preserves actual experiences, but also anticipates unrealized possibility, broadens the limited space of social behavior for new desires, claims, and goals, and thereby opens new paths of future experience.⁶⁷

The connection between aesthetics and lived experience, then, is that a literary work with an unfamiliar aesthetic form can break through its readers' expectations and simultaneously confront them with a question, the answer for which is absent from their repertoire of religiously or socially sanctioned experience.

While Jauss's manifesto is provocative, one would certainly be justified in questioning its practicality. Jauss dispels any doubts regarding applications of his theory in succeeding essays. He considers and interprets medieval literature and its generic evolutions, Valery's Faust, and he executes a very close reading of Baudelaire's "Spleen." This last essay best illustrates the thoroughness of his method. He divides his interpretation into three successive readings, each of which roughly corresponds to one of the three moments of hermeneutic activity-- understanding, interpretation, and application. He first encounters the text perceptually as an aesthetic experience. Next he performs an eidetic reduction on the aesthetic perception in order to understand it as an answer to an implicit question, carrying him into a reflective reduction on the part of interpretation. Finally, the interpretation itself becomes the foundation for an application; more precisely, "a text for the past is of interest not only in reference to its primary context," but also is "interpreted to disclose a possible significance for the contemporary situation."⁶⁸ For this task he posits an ideal reader, one who is historically informed but who can suspend historical or linguistic competence, replacing it with the capacity to wonder and to ask questions. This suggestion may be the weakest part of Jauss's theory in terms of its usefulness as a general pedagogical model. However, the weakness may be attenuated if we concentrate on that capacity

to wonder and deemphasize the literary competence which must, after all, be suspended. Another objection might be raised, that Jauss's project is really the revival of literary history, not the formulation of a new interpretive theory. That charge can be met most effectively by reminding the accuser that Jauss never claims to offer anything new; instead, he wishes to substitute an aesthetics of reception for an aesthetic of presentation. His accomplishment serves as a fitting conclusion to our discussion of reader-response critics; it also provides the final set of procedures useful in synthesizing a pedagogical model of literary interpretation.

Conclusion

Reader-response criticism returns attention to the receptor of the literary work and recognizes that the receptor is an historical being. Fish prefers the term "political"; nevertheless, he depicts the reader as one whose interpretive posture is determined by the canon of an interpretive community. Iser focuses his attention on the manner in which the text provokes a dialogical exchange with the reader, meanwhile undermining existing presuppositions and restructuring the reader's experience. Gadamer attempts to generalize regarding the historical nature of understanding, thus recalling the fundamental project of phenomenological hermeneutics as applied to aesthetic consciousness. He also emphasizes the inevitable historicity of the receiver, who is immersed in preunderstanding and anticipation. Finally, Jauss also adopts the dialogical model for the relationship existing between text and reader. This dialogue presupposes a sharing of tradition (preunderstanding) so that the reader confronts problems raised in the text (gaps of indeterminacy). Consequently, the literary text alters

the reader's horizon of expectation and acts as a liberating force for both the audience, by freeing them from previously held views, and the text, by permitting it to recover its impact. In all of these critics we can detect a common note of humanism--all are interested in promoting through understanding of literary texts an enlargement and reformulation of the lived praxis of the reader.

NOTES

¹ Jane P. Tompkins, ed., Reader-Response Criticism (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. ix.

² Tompkins, p. ix.

³ Tompkins, p. x.

⁴ Tompkins, p. 201.

⁵ Tompkins, p. 201.

⁶ Tompkins, p. 220.

⁷ Stanley Fish, Is There A Text in This Class? (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 16.

⁸ Fish, p. 14.

⁹ Fish, Surprised by Sin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 4.

¹⁰ Fish, Text, pp. 49-50.

¹¹ Fish, Text, p. 171.

¹² Fish, Text, p. 172.

¹³ Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 147.

- 14 Fish, Text, p. 168.
- 15 Lentricchia, p. 147.
- 16 Lentricchia, p. 148.
- 17 Lentricchia, p. 148.
- 18 Fish, Text, p. 318.
- 19 Fish, Text, p. 319.
- 20 Fish, Text, p. 335.
- 21 Fish, Text, p. 335.
- 22 Fish, Text, p. 336.
- 23 Fish, Text, p. 361.
- 24 Fish, Text, p. 365.
- 25 Lentricchia, p. 148.
- 26 Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 275.
- 27 Iser, p. 276.
- 28 Iser, p. 276.
- 29 Iser, pp. 278-279.
- 30 Iser, pp. 279-281.
- 31 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 219. See also The Prose of the World, trans. John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
- 32 Iser, p. 288. In speaking of defamiliarization, Iser, like his Konstanz associate Jauss, reveals the influence of the Russian formalist critics Schklovsky and Tomashevsky. See especially "Art as Technique" and "Thematics" in Russian Formalist Criticism, trans. Lemon and Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965).
- 33 Iser, p. 290.
- 34 Iser, The Act of Reading (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 21.
- 35 Iser, Reading, p. 33.

- 36 Lentricchia, p. 149.
- 37 Iser, Reading, p. 167.
- 38 Iser, Reading, p. 131.
- 39 Iser, Reading, pp. 182-183.
- 40 Iser, Reading, p. 198.
- 41 Iser, Reading, p. 200.
- 42 Iser, Reading, pp. 212-213.
- 43 Iser, Reading, pp. 225-226.
- 44 Iser, Reading, pp. 226-229.
- 45 Iser, Reading, p. 230.
- 46 Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. Sheed and Ward Ltd. (New York: Continuum Publishing Corporation, 1975), p. 207.
- 47 Gadamer, p. 175.
- 48 Gadamer, p. 258.
- 49 Gadamer, pp. 264-265.
- 50 Gadamer, p. 248.
- 51 Gadamer, p. 249.
- 52 Gadamer, p. 496.
- 53 David Couzens Hoy, The Critical Circle (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 99.
- 54 Hoy, p. 95.
- 55 Gadamer, pp. 76-77.
- 56 Lentricchia, pp. 153-154.
- 57 Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 15.
- 58 Jauss, p. 139.
- 59 Jauss, pp. 20-21.
- 60 Jauss, p. 22.

- 61 Jauss, p. 25.
- 62 Jauss, p. 28.
- 63 Jauss, p. 30.
- 64 Jauss, pp. 32-34.
- 65 Jauss, pp. 36-37.
- 66 Jauss, p. 39.
- 67 Jauss, p. 41.
- 68 Jauss, p. 143.

CHAPTER 4 BRIDGING THE GAPS

So far we have investigated a variety of critical theories and methodologies, revealing various congruencies where they occur. I think these congruencies can be viewed more easily if we conceive of them as a series of steps within which different methodologies operate in varying degrees of strength or weakness. The first step involves the evolution of hermeneutics and the focus which it brings to our reading of a text. We began by considering the origins of hermeneutics as an approach for rendering more accessible the thoughts of an author--the hermeneut's task was to interpret the "word" (either divine or literary) so that the auditor or reader might understand. The classical thinkers codified this task so as to encompass three distinct but interdependent activities--understanding, interpretation, and application. In other words, a hermeneut must first understand the message as something discrete and different from other messages; then he or she might interpret that message in more accessible language; finally, the hermeneut could attest to the significance of that message in terms of its applicability. These are the functions performed, at least traditionally, by the literary interpreter.

This approach becomes more complicated when adopted by Schleiermacher. While adhering to the univocal impetus of classical hermeneutic theory, Schleiermacher hints at a dialogical quality to the process--one voice, the primus inter pares, guides the hermeneut to an understanding of the text. That voice can belong to the author, and

the understanding achieved by the interpreter amounts to a recovery of the author's meaning. The interpreter attains this understanding through analysis of the grammatical and stylistic properties of the text, properties which reveal both collective and individual influences. In the end, understanding the text amounts to understanding the author. Schleiermacher's successor, Dilthey, further modifies the hermeneutic enterprise by emphasizing the historical consciousness. He acknowledges the intention of the author as a factor in interpretation, but he observes that recovery is made more difficult by the interpreter's historical distance from the author. And while the interpreter should not abandon altogether the attempt to recover the authorial voice, to fuse horizons, the hermeneut should acknowledge the historical disparity and attest to its power in discussing the application of the work. Schleiermacher and Dilthey both establish that hermeneutics is principally univocal in nature, but Dilthey introduces the dimension of historical consciousness as a moderator in the recovery of that voice.

Dilthey's infusion of the historical consciousness provides a point of departure for the twentieth-century opposition between monists and pluralists. On the basis of the univocality of ancient, classical, and nineteenth-century hermeneutic practices, Hirsch can argue for the legitimacy of objective, determinate meanings in works. He can also argue convincingly that the goal of interpretation is the recovery of the author's meaning, which he equates with the author's intention. However, Hirsch's adherence to the German tradition freezes him into the middle of the hermeneutic enterprise, that of interpretation. His failure (or refusal) to take up the moment of understanding constitutes a failure to consider fully the historical consciousness of the

reader, a consciousness which can affect the work's reception. Moreover, he stops short of the moment of application, claiming that to go any further than interpretation is to pass into a discussion of subjective significance rather than objective meaning. These two moments--understanding and application--as well as the issue of historical consciousness, are the features which separate Hirsch from Heidegger, Gadamer, and Jauss, all of whom practice a kind of revisionist hermeneutics. Heidegger brings to hermeneutics a phenomenological tone, an interest in the essential properties of the literary experience--for Heidegger, the voice of human experience. Heidegger also emphasizes the temporal dimension of hermeneutics, suggesting that anticipatory understanding is guided by the interpreter's historical placement, and without anticipatory understanding, interpretation cannot occur. Moreover, the fusion of horizons accomplished through interpretation allows the interpreter to apply the literary experience to lived experience. Gadamer continues this line of reasoning, although he retreats somewhat from Heidegger's more poetic professions. Gadamer views hermeneutics as an historical process for both the interpreter and what he interprets, since understanding always encompasses a point of view and thus looks toward application. Moreover, this application is based on the belief that a work's meaning is its actualization of lived experience. Finally, this position is taken up by Jauss, although he is primarily interested in reviving "literary history" as a study of the reciprocal nature of the aesthetic experience--how the reception of art influences society and vice versa. Jauss returns to hermeneutics some of the objectivity dispelled by Heidegger, but not so much as to align himself with Hirsch.

The tension between objectivity and subjectivity is also present in the second step in our pattern, phenomenology, and again Heidegger is a pivotal figure, for he is responsible for translating the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl into a more existential vocabulary. Husserl's chief contributions are his discussion of intentionality, which Hirsch appropriates, and his view of the epochē, the attempt to reach an object's essence through an eidetic reduction, and thus to remove personality from interpretation of phenomena. Heidegger just as emphatically revives personality, arguing that interpretation is a personal activity. Heidegger's existential phenomenology is taken up and expanded by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, both of whom seem most interested in describing the purpose of the literary experience. Sartre describes that purpose as the revelation of a being's pour soi through a fusion of authorial and readerly horizons in the text, while Merleau-Ponty describes that purpose as an opportunity for the reader to apprehend the Lebenswelt, the world of lived experience, as expressed in the text. These phenomenological views then diverge into different foci: the consciousness of the literary text, as examined by the Geneva critics of consciousness; and the ontology of the literary text, as formulated by Ingarden and Dufrenne. The Geneva critics, whose strongest voice is Poulet, concentrate on the manner in which the voice of the text reveals itself to the reader, as well as on what that voice reveals; in this respect they resemble Schleiermacher and Dilthey, with their interest in the dialogical nature of interpretation. Ingarden and Dufrenne, meanwhile, concentrate on describing the structural nature of the literary work. While this concentration might seem diametrically opposed to the interests of earlier phenomenologists,

in some respects their interests intersect: Ingarden, for example, describes phenomena he calls "gaps of indeterminacy," and these closely resemble the "gaps of equipmentality" described by Heidegger; both Ingarden and Heidegger conceive of these gaps as somehow forcing the interpreter to restructure existing preunderstanding. Moreover, this resemblance carries over into the domain of reader-response criticism.

The correspondence between Heidegger and Ingarden apparently influences the European practitioners of reader-response criticism, notably Iser and Juass. Gadamer is profoundly influenced by Heidegger, an influence noted in Chapter 1. However, what are we to make of one American representative of reader-response criticism, Stanley Fish? Does he carry the banner for any European hermeneuts or phenomenologists? Does he, in turn, influence any more recent thinkers? Fish himself does not acknowledge an intellectual debt to any of the thinkers we have been discussing, nor do any of them acknowledge his influence. Nevertheless, Fish's early approach, innovative as it might have appeared at first, does share some common ground with the phenomenological approach of the Geneva critics. Specifically, his attempts to justify a plurality of interpretive possibilities are grounded on his belief in the dialogical nature of the interpretive act. He also shares with them, as well as with Heidegger and Gadamer, a belief in the importance of preunderstanding, which Fish associates with the reader's membership in an interpretive community--a community similar to a literary historical consciousness. Withal, Fish argues that interpretation is always intersubjective, and is inescapable. Compared to Fish, his European counterparts seem mildly reactionary. Iser relies heavily on Ingarden's theory regarding gaps of indeterminacy, but he

modifies Ingarden's ontological tendencies by arguing that these gaps force readers to restructure their expectations of the text (a procedure resembling defamiliarization). By doing so, they participate in a reconstruction of the text's repertoire--its presumed social and aesthetic value system--so as to create a new experience. This process resembles the fusion of horizons pursued by the hermeneuts. Gadamer also valorizes this fusion of horizons, but emphasizes the historicity of the process--the reader must be conscious of historical distance from the text and so must acknowledge the influence of preunderstanding on interpretation. However, Gadamer also emphasizes that the text's original reception makes up part of the tradition which influences preunderstanding. It is this emphasis which forms the basis for Jauss's aesthetics of reception. He, like Iser and Gadamer, believes that the reader restructures experience through an encounter with the text; moreover, he shares with phenomenologists a conviction that interpretation is essentially dialogical. But he bases his system on the inseparableness of the three hermeneutic moments of understanding, interpretation, and application and argues that these moments can be fully realized only if one considers the original reception of the work as well as its current reception. He thus formulates a kind of reciprocity in which the society affects reception of the text, which in turn affects the society, a society resembling Fish's interpretive community.

By way of a theoretical funnel, then, we arrive at a point at which we need to distill these methodologies and theories into a manageable model for use in the classroom. This model is founded on the three moments of hermeneutics--understanding, interpretation, and

application--and calls for successive stages of reading. The first phase capitalizes on what Heidegger and Gadamer call preunderstanding and what Merleau-Ponty calls the natural attitude: the expectations that students bring to the text, expectations which are canonized by their interpretive community, which is essentially historical. These expectations are often disappointed by the text, however, so readers need to establish a dialogue with the text in the second phase. In this phase, students analyze the effect of these disappointments in restructuring their experience, and they come to accept the disappointment of expectations as a kind of defamiliarization, as gaps of indeterminacy which compel them to view experience in new ways. Finally, they proceed to apply their newly restructured experience, aided by a consideration of the text's influence on earlier readers. They thus interpret not only the text, but also its previous interpretations. At this stage the voice of the text emerges, giving coherence to the text as it has passed through successive interpretations. Moreover, this actualization of meaning is not final, for an appreciation of the historical nature of hermeneutics implies that future interpretations are likely.

Quite justifiably, the question might now be asked, Who is the practitioner of this complex of interpretive phases? Who is the "ideal" reader? Perhaps a more appropriate epithet would be "composite" reader, for the reader I imagine performing these stages of reading combines qualities of both the teacher and the student. This characterization seems appropriate within the context of my project, as well as within the context of hermeneutics, for it is based on the dialogical nature of interpretation. Specifically, the teacher half of the composite

reader is what Fish calls the informed, "at home" reader; he or she is a member of the interpretive community and is well aware of the traditions and "repertoire" pertaining to that community. In addition, he or she also resembles Jauss's ideal reader in his or her capacity to wonder at and ask questions of the text. In this capacity my composite reader represents the student, who no doubt has read and analyzed literature, but who probably has not thought of a particular text as part of a larger canon. What special knowledge regarding style or genre this reader might possess, he or she should be able to suspend so as to allow the text to exercise its disrupting influence. In this dialogue, in which the text assumes the role of the primus inter pares, the composite reader participates in the historical nature of reading--the search for some shared experience which will illuminate the past and present mutually. In effect, the teacher half facilitates this search by providing the student half with such historical or aesthetic information as might be deemed relevant; thus the stages of reading become a metaphor for what can happen in the classroom. Such a process is somewhat time-consuming, but the result will be infinitely more rewarding than any result yielded by a cursory, "uninformed" reading or by an imposed, directed reading. The text's meaning will not be actualized fully in one reading; rather, stages of reading will be necessary for the work to sufficiently expand and restructure the reader's horizons of expectation and experience.

My composite reader, then, embarks on a series of readings which correspond to the three moments of the hermeneutic project in a manner similar to the procedure outlined by Jauss. As we noted in the previous chapter, Jauss observes a change of horizons between the readings,

and we must remember that these changes are not exclusively progressive; rather, the reader might retrospectively establish the significance of a particular passage after resolving previously encountered indeterminacies. In any event, the first reading brings the reader into contact with the work as a literary work of art. This reading forms the basis for an understanding of the work as an aesthetic object, and during the course of the reading several activities occur simultaneously. The aesthetic experience can be divided into three aspects: poiesis, aesthesis, and catharsis.¹ Poiesis is the productive side of the aesthetic experience, in which one recognizes the function of the work as a voice and not as an artifact. Jauss discusses this aspect as a process during which "aesthetic practice frees itself step by step from restrictions that were imposed on productive activity in both the classical and the biblical tradition."² We might view this aspect as the natural attitude of which Husserl and Merleau-Ponty speak; in approaching the work or the passage, one does so with certain preunderstandings and expectations. For example, if I read Jacques' speech from As You Like It, "All the world's a stage . . .," I expect that as an expression in a play it will reveal something of significance to me in my quest for the play's meaning. I do not expect it to express literal truth, as would a statement such as "All the world's a sphere." In short, the production of meaning in aesthetic experience can be categorically different from the production of meaning in lived praxis, and I approach the text with that preunderstanding.

As I attend to the productive aspect of the aesthetic experience, however, I am also participating in the receptive aspect, that of aesthesis. As I become aware of the aesthetic object, in this case a

speech from As You Like It, I also encounter a mode of experience that is not natural as the view of this represented world discloses itself in its otherness. This encounter may be likened to Husserl's epochē and Merleau-Ponty's suspension of the natural attitude. My manner of seeing, led along by the speech, opens up to a horizon of experience of a world viewed differently, a world where misanthropes wander through forests and declaim their weariness and disillusionment. But we should remember that I want to be led along because I know that this is a speech in a play, and my preunderstanding of its nature as aesthetic object predisposes me to this activity.

The third moment of this first reading, this understanding of the text as aesthetic object, is its communicative aspect--catharsis. Jauss derives his view of catharsis from three sources: the Aristotelian understanding of cathartic pleasure, the Augustinian criticism of the enjoyment of curiositas, and Gorgias' explanation of effectiveness in oratory.³ Jauss then defines catharsis as "the enjoyment of affects as stirred by speech or poetry which can bring about both a change in belief and the liberation of his mind in the listener or spectator."⁴ This moment is closely related to the other two because it arises from the dialectical exchange between self-enjoyment and enjoyment of what is other; in other words, catharsis arises from active participation in the constitution of the imaginary. I enjoy Jacques' speech because I am participating in the actualization of its meaning through a change of horizons, an activity which is possible only because the speech is an aesthetic object. The final effect of this first reading is admittedly limited. I recognize the work as aesthetic object; I understand its nature and I enjoy it. But other levels of meaning exist, and I must prepare to seek them through further reading.

While this first reading prepares the way for critical understanding of the work, it is not the moment with which my project is principally concerned. I must presume that in a classroom, students are already predisposed to accept texts as aesthetic objects, although they may be skeptical of such objects' value. We do, however, need to establish the dialogical movement which carries them from the first reading, in which they understand the text as aesthetic object, into the second reading, in which they encounter the retrospective horizon of interpretive understanding. The student, who concretizes the text in the course of receiving line after line and is led toward the ending in a perceptual act of anticipation of possible form and meaning, becomes aware of the text's fulfilled form, but not yet of its fulfilled significance nor its "whole meaning." In order for the student to approach more closely this whole meaning, it will be necessary for him or her to retrospectively analyze those sections of the text which were problematic, and to assess the effects of those sections on understanding. In this reading the interpretive understanding is founded on a recognition of strategies and repertoire. This level of reading requires a more specialized consciousness of literary devices and of the literary canon; consequently, the teacher half must be prepared to provide the necessary background. By doing so, the teacher enables the student to practice a phenomenological description as outlined by Merleau-Ponty.⁵

We have already established the aesthetic nature of Jacques' speech, but so far we have succeeded only in understanding it as aesthetic object through our enjoyment of its otherness—it is not ordinary language, and it does not express our literal world view. The otherness

of this view, I perceive, relies on two characteristics. First, it is an extended metaphor; while I may be capable of constructing a metaphor in ordinary speech, it is unlikely that I will pursue that metaphor through seven distinct stages. Second, this extended metaphor is founded on the theatrum mundi convention, a topic codified during the middle ages and which has by now become a commonplace within our interpretive community. What then leads me into the second level of reading? Surely I am familiar with the concept of role-playing, yet something about this speech does not express the usual sentiments. The first line, "All the world's a stage," arrests me with its assertiveness: it posits a correspondence, not a congruence. Why does Shakespeare have Jacques use a metaphor here instead of a simile? Perhaps because Jacques' character is of a more assured nature than the use of a simile would indicate. Then again, the theatrum mundi topic traditionally is expressed metaphorically. The second line, "And all the men and women merely players," extends the metaphor to those who populate the world. But why does Jacques use the adverb merely? Nothing in the first line prepares me for such a devaluation. Perhaps this rhetorical construction indicates a tone which will be prevalent and which will aid in my actualization of meaning. However, the next few lines assume rhetorical neutrality: "They have their exits and their entrances,/ And one man in his lifetime plays many parts,/ His acts being seven ages." In these lines the metaphor is extended even more, but not in unexpected directions. It makes sense to speak of people having exits and entrances; it also makes sense to speak of an individual playing many parts. Certainly my horizon of expectation can accommodate such observations. Still, one jarring effect occurs in the

phrase, "His acts being seven ages." What does this mean? I could almost anticipate acts being stages, but are ages here physical or historical? At this point I am caught in a gap of indeterminacy which disrupts my interpretive flow. My horizon of expectation now requires mediation.

I find that mediation in the next part of the speech, in which the seven ages are enumerated. The voice of the text clarifies in what sense the ages are to be taken, but it raises another question: How does this extension correspond to the original metaphor? Here the indeterminacy is thematic rather than structural. How can one speak of an individual playing the role of an infant or of a schoolboy? Surely these ages are not constituted of self-conscious role-playing; "mewling and puking" in a mother's arms hardly seems contrived behavior. I feel more comfortable with the lover, "with a woeful ballad/ Made to his mistress' eyebrow." This behavior is contrived, and the diction and syntax are delightfully bathetic in their movement from the sublime act of creation to the absurd particularity of creation's object. The undercutting persists when I reach the soldier, "Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard," and the justice "In fair round belly and good capon lined." These ages are subjected to a virulent kind of satire, as if to suggest that the speaker sees through these poses. Yet this tone does not persist, for Jacques next considers the sixth age shifting "Into the lean and slippered pantaloons." The tone here is less vehement, and while he does note such absurdities as hose too large for a "shrunk shank," Jacques chronicles the "last scene of all . . . second childishness and mere oblivion,/ Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything." Even the rhythm of these last few

lines slows to a deliberate pace as if to represent the gait of a feeble old man shuffling off the stage. But as appropriate as the rhythm might be, I am still troubled by the suggestion that the sixth and seventh ages play roles in the sense that the lover or the soldier do. In fact, I also note that these last ages have no titles; instead, the ages themselves are personified, departing from the pattern established earlier in the speech. In a manner of speaking, the text offers many indeterminacies--we might interpret this situation as the text asking questions--and I must respond to those indeterminacies through my interpretation.

It should be apparent that this interpretive moment can draw upon many different disciplines--linguistics, semiotics, poetics and aesthetics, even philosophy. It is also clear that not every reader will be equally adept in manipulating these tools. But once the teacher half provides the student half with a working knowledge of such disciplines, most readers will be capable of identifying their own expectations and then examining the ways in which the text disappoints those expectations, thus leading them to reconstitute meaning. Here the Russian formalist technique of defamiliarization is in full play, making strange what is ordinarily commonplace in experience. For instance, the concept of playing roles is familiar to most of us. However, the sense in which it is used by Jacques suggests an alternative interpretation. My expectation of the familiar is disappointed when Jacques identifies the acts of man as seven ages and proceeds to expand that scheme. Here I fall back on the original significance of the convention, that of the theatre of the world presided over by a divine playwright. This original horizon of interpretive understanding can

now mediate my own horizon--the theatre of the world as a stage for consciously assumed roles acted out by self-conscious individuals. This mediation of horizons leads me to recognize a connection between the sense of the speech and its increasingly melancholy tone: this role-playing is determined, the parts are assigned, and therefore Jacques' misanthropy is largely a railing against fate (as he perceives it). My second reading has terminated in a constitution of meaning through the retrospective horizon of interpretive understanding brought about by the analysis of the text's constituent parts. Still, I am left with more questions, this time regarding the partiality of my interpretation. If I wish to avoid an arbitrary perspective (based upon my own limited historical consciousness), I need to encounter the horizon that conditioned the genesis and reception of the work originally. To investigate this horizon is the task of a third, historical reading.

In his essay on Baudelaire's "Spleen," Jauss recommends that readers ask about original expectations, literary tradition, and historical as well as social situation.

In such questions historical understanding is not only directed toward the reconstruction of the past. It should at the same time bring to view the temporal distance that was leapt over in the first and second stages of our readings, and allow one to recognize through the explicit separation of the past and present horizons of understanding how the meaning of the poem has unfolded itself historically in the interaction between effect and reception.⁶

This task may be somewhat difficult with Jacques' speech, as it is part of a drama, but we can speculate about the contemporary conditions of reception. We have already touched upon the medieval

understanding of theatrum mundi, and this understanding would still influence a seventeenth-century audience. By this time, however, Shakespeare has already begun to point his audience toward our modern understanding through his development of certain allusions. Throughout the early history plays which precede As You Like It, he reveals individuals consciously assuming roles for which they are ill-suited. A contemporary audience might well wonder at the significance of this passage in light of the evolution of the convention. Moreover, they might wonder at another convention, the expression of contemptus mundi. While they would be familiar with this variety of misanthropy, they might be uncomfortable about its association with a divinely ordered scheme, the seven ages of man. Or is Jacques' speech truly an expression of contemptus mundi? Here again, Shakespeare may be defamiliarizing a convention, leading his audience to restructure their expectations of the aesthetic experience.

Because the modern undergraduate student is rarely familiar with a wide range of historical or social background information, the teacher should provide the necessary information or recommend sources from which such information can be obtained. This background information is critical, for it makes possible the historical understanding essential for bridging the gap between past and present horizons of understanding. In examining this vital set of codes--contemporary rhetorical conventions and conditions of reception--the reader gains access to the complex of associations required for a more complete understanding of the text; in this sense the examination resembles the transcendental analytic of phenomenology.⁷ This stage of reading also corresponds to the hermeneutic moment of application, and we are

concerned here with application for ourselves as well as for the text's original audience. Essentially, a text's application is constructive; as Jauss suggests, "application here cannot dissolve into practical action, but rather instead can satisfy the no less legitimate interest of using literary communication with the past to measure and to broaden the horizon of one's own experience vis-à-vis the experience of the other."⁸ In this case, we are interested in enlarging our experience through mediation with the experience of Shakespeare's character. How, then, is this enlargement made possible? More specifically, how can the experience of a character in a seventeenth-century play affect my experience; how can his horizon alter mine?

The answer to these questions may lie in the history of the text's reception, or in the newness of the form. We have already seen that two conventions are central to this speech--theatrum mundi and contemptus mundi. Moreover, these conventions are important to the Elizabethan world view; at least, evidence from other works of the period indicates this correlation. Yet this speech combines these conventional elements in an unfamiliar manner by making the contemptus mundi a condition of the theatrum mundi, thus indicating a more humanistic tone than is often encountered in Elizabethan literature. Our experience of this evolution is influenced somewhat by familiarity with the dominant philosophy of the period. As Iser and Jauss suggest, once we recognize in the horizon of the work a movement toward something new, we gain new insight. We see, first of all, the evolution of a new form or idea out of an old form, as well as a consequent revision of the canon of accepted conventions. But we also see where our current humanism originates, or at least how Shakespeare is

instrumental in formulating it. Our experience of the other--both the other voice and the otherness of that voice in relation to contemporary voices--broadens the horizon of our experience--both in lived praxis and in relation to the text. This relationship is the most effective formulation of application, and it has several virtues to recommend it. First, it is historically grounded on contemporary conditions of reception; in other words, it acknowledges how the text is new in form. Second, because of its historical grounding, it avoids the threat of subjectivism; instead, it is transsubjective. Finally, it dispels the concern expressed by Hirsch over significance, for the text's meaning is bound up in its significance. In other words, the text's current meaning is a reorientation of its historical significance.

A strict application of Jauss's methodology is rather cumbersome and perhaps too involved for general classroom use, for it relies on the centrality of historical research in to actual instances of reception. For these reasons, pedagogical and pragmatic, I have tempered Jauss's revival of literary history with Iser's more modest claims to describe the act of reading in relation to interpretation; in effect, my purpose is not so much to justify this model as to present it as an alternative to interpretive systems which seek to divorce the text from experience. But by way of justification, I offer this conditional observation: if we admit that teaching literature is part of a larger humanistic enterprise, then we should not ignore the need for some aesthetic and historical discussion. We may construct our curriculum around the interpretive moment, with its emphasis on stylistic analysis. But our courses may be more successful if we acknowledge the influence of literature, and influences on it, by preceding such

discussions with an introduction to aesthetic reception and following them with reference to historical reception. In doing so we will provide students with a greater sense of continuity in the realm of literature. Moreover, we will probably be more successful in leading them to enlarge their horizons of experience if we can show them how such enlargement fits into an historical context. In any event, I trust that the next three chapters will demonstrate the effectiveness of this model to the hermeneutic enterprise of actualizing meaning.

NOTES

¹ While Jauss does not treat these aspects necessarily as part of a first reading, presenting them only as sides of the aesthetic experience, I have chosen to include them as part of the first reading because it is the basis of the aesthetic understanding of the work.

² Hans Robert Jauss, Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 46.

³ Jauss, pp. 22ff.

⁴ Jauss, p. 92.

⁵ The resemblance suggested here presumes that the reader conducts a phenomenological description of the constituent parts of the text--its ideas and devices--while analyzing it. In actuality, this process is carried out between the teacher and the student.

⁶ Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 170.

⁷ This correspondence is justified by the transcendental analytic's view of the phenomenon as somehow greater than the sum of its parts, as if the allusions contained within the text point outward in arcs of intentionality toward the world latent in the text.

⁸ Jauss, Aesthetic of Reception, p. 147.

CHAPTER 5
IRONY AS A MEDIATING STRATEGY
IN THE CANTERBURY TALES

The Canterbury Tales is fixed firmly in the canon of western literature, and the irony in Chaucer's work has been recognized from the time of its appearance. While irony has long been considered a rhetorical trope, recent critics such as Kenneth Burke and Wayne Booth have insisted that it is a pervasive device.¹ I do not intend to demonstrate that Chaucer is ironic; many critics have already demonstrated that point adequately. Nor do I intend to analyze the entire text of The Canterbury Tales. Instead, I wish to examine various ironic moments in the text and show how successive readings for understanding, interpretation, and application facilitate a change in the horizon of the reader. To do this it will first be necessary to establish what irony is and why it is useful in experiencing the text. I shall then reconstruct what happens to my ideal reader, as described in Chapter 4, during the successive readings of specific ironic moments; here I shall focus more closely on the readings for interpretation and application as the reading for aesthetic understanding is presumably complete--the reader already knows that this text is an aesthetic object. Finally, I shall attempt to explain how these successive readings restructure the reader's experience, both of the work and of lived praxis.

The term irony is derived from the Greek noun eironeia, meaning "dissimulation." In Greek comedy the eiron was the underdog, weak but clever, who usually triumphed over the stupid and boastful alazon. Later, in Plato's dialogues, Socrates plays the part of the eiron,

whose questions seem naive or foolish, but who nevertheless demolishes his antagonist's case. Expanding the original formula, classical rhetoricians identified several varieties of irony, such as litotes, hyperbole, antiphrasis, and mimesis. These cumbersome distinctions were adopted wholesale by Renaissance critics and persisted through the eighteenth century. Modern discussions, however, tend to emphasize two principal categories: verbal irony and dramatic irony. Verbal irony is a form of speech in which one meaning is intended while a different meaning, usually antithetical, is articulated; thus it depends on an explicit or implicit contradiction. Dramatic irony is a plot device whereby several effects are possible: (a) the spectators know more than the protagonist; (b) the character reacts in an inappropriate fashion; (c) characters or situations are compared or contrasted for ironic effect; (d) there is a marked contrast between what the character understands about his or her acts and what the play demonstrates about them. In both of these forms of irony the emphasis is on a disparity or disappointment, thus establishing a form of dialectic.

Kenneth Burke focuses on the dialectic nature of irony when he asserts that the trope relies on a form of identification with one's enemy whereby each participant is objectified. "True irony . . . is based upon a sense of fundamental kinship with the enemy, as one needs him, is indebted to him, is not merely outside him as an observer but contains him within, being consubstantial with him."² This mutual objectification might almost be interpreted as equivalent to phenomenological actualization and fusing of horizons--each participant is fully realized as a subject in a dialogue, making possible an exchange of views which leads to the fusion of horizons. Yet this

consubstantiality is not absolute in irony, for "although all the characters in a dramatic or dialectic development are necessary qualifiers of the definition, there is usually some one character that enjoys the role of primus inter pares . . . This is the role of Socrates in the Platonic dialogue, for instance."³ It is this character who provides the focus for the audience's perception of irony. Sometimes this focus is immediately obvious, as in sarcasm; sometimes it is evident only in retrospect. But such a voice is almost always present, and we shall see in The Canterbury Tales how that voice invests our experience of the text with meaning through successive readings.

While Burke's observations are useful in identifying irony, we are more concerned with its function as a device for admitting us to the world of the text. It is helpful at this point to recall Iser's discussion of repertoire and strategies from Chapter 3. The strategies are those techniques used in the work to disrupt the reader's expectations, and the repertoire is close to what literary historians view as the social and aesthetic backgrounds of the work.⁴ As we have observed before, Iser refers to the text's potential for defamiliarizing these social and literary conventions, thus revealing his affinity with the Russian formalists. The significance of Iser to our discussion of irony in The Canterbury Tales is that irony can be seen as a textual strategy which calls the reader's attention to certain values or beliefs, extratextual or intratextual, while creating gaps of indeterminacy in the reader's horizon of expectations. To fill these gaps the reader must actively participate with the primus inter pares of the text; this participation leads to a restructuring of experience.

The role of the reader in this process is critical; as Jauss would attest, the reader is responsible for actualizing the work through dialogue with it. In accomplishing this actualization, readers bring to the work certain presuppositions and expectations which more or less conform to the work's repertoire. When readers encounter disruptions and transformations, reorientation is necessary. As Iser observes, "Instead of reproducing the system to which it refers, it [the literary text] almost invariably tends to take as its dominant 'meaning' those possibilities that have been neutralized or negated by that system . . . It begins to activate that which the system has left inactive."⁵ Here Iser is candid regarding the corrective role literature plays vis-à-vis reality: "The pragmatic meaning . . . enables the literary text to fulfill its function as an answer by revealing and balancing out the deficiencies of the systems that have created the problem."⁶ The Canterbury Tales reveals these deficiencies through irony, and the reader responds by formulating a new reality out of realities that are presupposed and subsequently undermined. As Iser remarks, "The literary work is to be considered not as something that exists or has existed, but as a reformulation of an already formulated reality, which brings into the world something that did not exist before."⁷ This reformulation begins in our understanding of the text as an aesthetic object and the role irony plays in guiding our reception.

Understanding The Canterbury Tales: A First Reading

As indicated in the interpretive model offered in Chapter 4, the first reading, corresponding to the hermeneutic moment of understanding, can be viewed as constituted by three aspects: poieisis, aesthesis, and catharsis. These aspects are not distinct; rather, they influence

one another in leading the reader toward an understanding of the work as an aesthetic object. In facilitating this understanding, the work gradually alters the presuppositions the reader has inevitably brought to the reading; for this reason we overlay this pattern of aesthetic response on the natural attitude and its suspension proposed by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. The presuppositions which comprise the natural attitude can be divided into social and aesthetic. These are the repertoire of the work, and they provide the impetus for my first reading. As the principal aim of my investigation is to establish a method for interpretation, I shall spend no more time on this stage than is necessary to provide the dialogical foundation for the second and third stages of reading.

In my first reading of The Canterbury Tales, I (adopting the role of the ideal, composite reader) first recognize the function of this text as a voice (and language) from the past. This is the moment of poiesis, of the productive aspect, in which I recognize the text not as a technical or manufactory artifact, but as an expression of the author's experience. Of course certain preunderstandings and expectations guide my experience of the text at this stage. I expect that the text, produced in the fourteenth century, will describe or represent certain events peculiar to that period. I expect that the text, composed of verse and prose, will display some purpose for that division. I also expect that, as a product of the fourteenth century, the text will express certain ideas and values which had significance in that period. Finally, I expect that as a literary work of fiction, this text will express its truths in a style and manner different from a religious treatise of the same period. In this respect, the production

of meaning in this aesthetic experience will be different from the production of meaning in some other form. This series of preunderstandings and expectations can also be applied to individual passages, but at that level the expectations are sometimes challenged, as we discover in the moment of aesthesis.

While I am reading, aware of the singularity of the aesthetic object's mode of production, I am also participating in the work's receptive aspect, that of aesthesis. As I read The Canterbury Tales, I encounter a mode of experience that is not natural; the world of the text discloses itself in its otherness. This experience may be likened to the suspension of the natural attitude, for the otherness disclosed in this world sometimes violates the conventions which constitute my expectations of the text. One specific instance of such disruption is the use of irony--I must now adjust my expectations to accommodate the presence of this rhetorical trope. Moreover, I must now prepare myself for the destabilizing effects which attend irony. Early in the text, as in The General Prologue, the irony is direct and accessible, but my previous experience with that trope leads me to expect that such ease of reading may not continue. Here a restructuring of expectations becomes necessary--The Canterbury Tales is not only a fictive, narrative text; it is an ironic text as well, and so certain features must be anticipated. In effect, my manner of seeing, led along by the text, is gradually and almost imperceptibly opening up to a horizon of experience expressed by the text, a world in which pilgrims from diverse backgrounds band together and exchange stories of diverse forms and antecedents. Still, this process is voluntary; I want to encounter this other world because my preunderstanding predisposes me to believe

that this experience will be significant to me, a belief which is validated by the third moment of this first reading.

The third moment of this understanding of the text as aesthetic object is its communicative aspect--catharsis. As we have already discovered, this moment does not answer to the Aristotelean understanding so much as embody an enjoyment of aesthetic effects for their corrective value. One of my expectations of the aesthetic experience is that it will enable me to enlarge my horizon of experience. I therefore anticipate that result and enjoy the text with that anticipation in mind. Specifically, I enjoy the ironic passages in The Canterbury Tales, at least the ones accessible to a first reading, because I understand their function as disruptors, as gaps of indeterminacy. I am self-consciously enjoying this process, in part because I am a confidante to the text; I am a partner in the actualization of meaning. Even if the irony is not initially accessible to me, I know that I am expected to understand, for the clues are present. In short, my catharsis results from active participation in the constitution of the imaginary, from the change of horizons which is possible only because the text is an aesthetic object.

Thus far I have succeeded in understanding The Canterbury Tales as an aesthetic object--a fictive, narrative, ironic text of the fourteenth century, one which I expect will enable me to enlarge and restructure my experience through active participation in the interpretation of the expression of experience in the text. But how shall I commence that participation? Specifically, how shall I take the next step in the dialogue initiated by the text? The answer lies in recognizing the form of the question asked by text. I have already noted

the presence of irony in the work, and this trope is inquisitive by nature: "You thought you knew what the text was saying, but what do you make of this?" I respond as Iser suggests is appropriate, by attempting to discover the "deficiencies inherent in prevalent norms and in [my] own restricted behavior."⁸ The experience of the text facilitates this discovery by foregrounding indeterminacy, the confusion that arises from a multiplicity of views presented in the text, each of which seems to move toward some affirmation of a value or belief, but which is then undercut. In the first reading I confront this oscillation; in the second reading I must attempt to "pin down the oscillating structure of the text to some specific meaning."⁹ I can accomplish this task in part by analyzing the constituent parts of the text, and analysis leads us toward the work's "whole meaning."

Interpreting The Canterbury Tales: A Second Reading

My second reading of the text provides me with the opportunity to retrospectively analyze those sections which were problematic, which created gaps of indeterminacy. The tools for this retrospective analysis are phenomenology and reader-response criticism. Irony, as a gap of indeterminacy or equipmentality, brings me to stand against what the text says, thus making me conscious of "opposition . . . operating in the use of a word, or in larger elements of a work, including its form and the narrator's manner."¹⁰ This consciousness of opposition draws me further into a phenomenological encounter with the otherness of the text. One source of this opposition is the identity of the narrator, a problem I need to resolve before I can effectively interpret the work's irony. Who, precisely, is being ironic? Sometimes the

individual tellers of tales are ironic, while at other times the narrator is ironic; occasionally, even the author intrudes with some ironic observation. H. Marshall Leicester offers a solution to the apparent plurality of voices by claiming that the tales are individually voiced, yet joined together by an "insistent, though perhaps intermittent, textuality . . . the way the work repeatedly breaks the fiction of spoken discourse and the illusion of the frame to call attention to itself as a written thing."¹¹ I encounter this textuality as a disruption of my expectation regarding the work's conventions of narration; a solution seems to be that the text is the only voice, the voice of the poet. In that case, his voice is the source of text's irony and ultimately of its meaning.

Having established the source of irony, my second reading must next include an analysis of the various modes of irony in the work and their effects. Perhaps the most easily recognized and interpreted mode is in Chaucer's general mode of expression--verbal irony. In other words, the textual voice articulates one meaning but intends or evokes another. One of my first encounters with this mode occurs with the description of the Prioress in the General Prologue. I read that on the pilgrimage "Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioress."¹² From this description I expect a religious figure, as social convention teaches. However, I later read effusive praise of this character's appearance and manners:

She leet no morsel from her lippes falle,
No wette hir fyngres in hir sauce depe;
Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe
That no droppe ne fille upon hir brest.

. . .
Ful semely hir wympul pynched was,
Hir nose tretys, hir eyen greye as glas,
Hir mouth ful smal, and thereto softe and reed . . .

(I.128-131; 151-153)

Nowhere in this description do I encounter any mention of religious values. In fact, I must suspect that this nearly salacious attention to physical detail ("mouth ful smal . . .") is utterly inappropriate to its object, or that the Prioress herself invites such description through a very worldly preoccupation with her appearance. In any event, my initial presumption about the character is altered by the ironic description; the familiar is set against the unfamiliar, the unexpected, or the incongruous. Similarly, the Monk keeps greyhounds and enjoys hunting, and the Friar is "a wantowne and a merye,/ A lymatour, a ful solempne man" (I.208-209). Again my expectations are surprised or disappointed, and I question the values on which my expectations were founded. The ideal religious life (assumption) is set against the reality of medieval religious life (as expressed in the text) through ironic juxtaposition. I must somehow find a means for resolving these extremes, particularly as the textual voice withholds any overt expression of judgment.

Clerical members of the party are not the only victims of verbal irony. The Wife of Bath, for instance, is first presented as a sympathetic figure: "But she was somdel deef, and that was scathe" (I.446). She is also pious, but I am led to revise my first impression by this observation: "In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon/ That to the offrynge bfore hire sholde goon;/ And if ther dide, certyn so wroothe was she,/ That she was out of alle charitee" (I.449-452). My horizon of expectation and experience is mediated by that of the text, and I subsequently revise it. Other examples of verbal irony occur later in the text, but they are not usually as provocative, nor is the narrator's intrusion as pronounced. For example, the simplest kind of irony,

inversion, is expressed in the comment in The Merchant's Tale regarding the marriage of January and May: "To take a wyf it is a glorious thyng,/ And namely whan a man is oold and hoor" (IV.1268-1269). This irony is relatively stable in two respects: its reception is not altered by time, nor does it undercut established social or moral values as other ironic passages do. In fact, this passage appears to uphold conventions--old men should not marry young women--through irony. Still, the most frequent effect of the text's irony is to destabilize by defamiliarizing and creating indeterminacy.

The destabilizing possibilities of irony are evident in another mode existing in the way a speaker presents himself or herself--this is irony of manner. This mode is not mutually exclusive of verbal irony, but rather constitutes a kind of continuum; in Ramsey's view, "as verbal irony becomes not an occasional gambit but a customary strategy and mode of communication, it is clear that the speaker has adopted a manner which informs the seemingly most innocent of his remarks."¹³ This kind of irony operates on two levels, as I discover in determining the voice of the text; on one level, different characters appear to undercut their own remarks. More consistently, however, this mode of irony is used by the controlling voice of the poet. Nowhere in the text is this form of irony more discernible than in the frequent disclaimers Chaucer uses to dissociate himself from the narrative's subject matter. As Ramsey points out, "irony of manner usually implies a consciousness of disparity by the principal."¹⁴ The principal in this case is Chaucer the poet, and the disparity of which he is conscious extends to the tension between his inevitable presence as author and his feigned absence as narrator/character. I too become aware of this disparity, and I may

attempt to resolve it by fixing Chaucer's strategy in the realm of the familiar. As E. Talbot Donaldson suggests, Chaucer's narrator is part of the tradition of the fallible first-person singular whose credulity radically illustrates a vision of the social world imposed on one of the moral world.¹⁵ As feasible as this view sounds, however, I am struck by an otherness of much greater magnitude than mere authorial consciousness of disparity; Chaucer seems to be self-consciously aware of his role in creation, and so promotes a willing participation on my part in the creation of the text's meaning, its affirmation of life. Chaucer accomplishes this in part through adopting an irony of manner in respect to the very conventions he uses. My appreciation for this strategy can be enhanced by familiarity with those conventions, and my interpretation is thus adjusted accordingly.

My restructuring of expectation regarding aesthetic values is particularly pronounced when I encounter Chaucer's disclaimer at the end of the General Prologue. I confront several indeterminacies in the space of this passage, but the last several lines are the most problematic:

Crist spak hymself ful brode in hooly writ,
 And wel ye woot no vileyne is it.
 Eek Plato seith, whoso that kan hym rede,
 The wordes moote be cosyn to the dede.
 Also I prey yow to foryeve it me,
 Al have I nat set folk in hir degree
 Heere in this tale, as that they sholde stonde.
 My wit is short, ye may wel understonde.

(I.739-746)

In these lines, Chaucer touches on several of the themes central to the text, but the disclaimer is indeterminate in its very presence. Of course it may be seen as a variation on the medieval topic of affected modesty. Ernst Curtius points out that "it behooved the orator to put

his hearers in a favorable, attentive, tractable state of mind. How do this? First, through a modest presence. But one has to draw attention to this modesty oneself. Thus it becomes affected modesty."¹⁶ So Chaucer transfers a convention of oral discourse to written discourse, and I build an expectation around that convention. Yet a problem remains, for despite its illusion of oral discourse, the text is still written, and I have expectations regarding that genre which are different from those regarding oral narration. One such expectation is that the author will be an authority, yet here the author undercuts his own authority through his irony of manner. I might be inclined to dismiss this problem as merely a vestige of a dissipating oral convention, but the recurrence of such modest protestations, and the occurrence of the Retraction at the end of the text, suggest that affected modesty is not all that it seems.

Chaucer's irony of manner reaches a critical level in his Retraction at the conclusion of the Tales. What previously had been only an objection of inability now becomes a disclaimer for the entire work. Chaucer beseeches his audience to "preye for me that Crist have mercy on me and foryeve me my giltes;/ and namely my translacions and enditynges of worldly vanitees," among which he includes "the tales of Canterbury, thilke that sownen into synne" (X.1081ff). Many critics have debated the inclusion of the Retraction in the Chaucer canon, for it certainly does not seem consistent with the tone of the rest of the work. Some critics have gone so far as to suggest that it is the work of an overzealous scribe, while others have suggested that it is the work of a dying Chaucer under the influence of religious fear for his immortal soul.¹⁷ Such opinions, it seems to me, ignore the textuality

of The Canterbury Tales and the attendant possibility that the Retraction can be read as a parody, or at least an ironic treatment, of the affected-modesty topic. In short, Chaucer's irony of manner expands into an ironic undercutting of a literary convention. If I consider the indeterminacy that has been prevalent in my reading, then I might view the Retraction as one last frustration of my expectations. Having reached the end of the pilgrimage, emblematic of the soul's journey through life, with the Parson's moral exordium, emblematic of the New Jerusalem, I am confronted by a disclaimer of the entire project. Does this mean that the moral vision at the end is also vain? Judson Allen offers an alternative interpretation when he suggests of the Parson's Tale that "Chaucer's language is ironic and . . . his aesthetic and moral attitudes are Boethian."¹⁸ Allen concludes from his investigation of extratextual evidence that the Parson's penitential recommendations are a likely target for Chaucer's irony given his irreverent treatment of other medieval values. I might comfortably predict that the system of penance which the Parson extols would have no special privilege; contemptus mundi is not the ultimate good, for a love which can use the world without serving it is a greater good. Such a suggestion anticipates the Retraction, provides a retrospective explanation for previously indeterminate passages, and so reinforces the restructuring of experience which Chaucer's irony has been affecting so far.

The fluctuating currents of anticipation and recollection lead me to investigate another mode of irony in The Canterbury Tales, that of structural irony, which exists both within individual tales and in the larger structure of the entire work. According to Ramsey, "the fundamental methods of structural irony are arrangement and juxtaposition."¹⁹

This method is illustrated by the proximity of the Parson's Tale and the Retraction, and is generally apparent in the order of presentation of the pilgrims in the General Prologue. While disagreement exists regarding the order of the tales, the most obvious example of the relations among certain tales perhaps is the so-called Marriage Group. The group is composed of various rhetorical positions, consisting of assertion (the Wife of Bath's Tale), comment (the tales of the Friar and Summoner), countercomment (the Clerk's Tale), and solution (the Franklin's Tale). The ironic nature of this group derives from the underlying assumption which Chaucer calls into question, that authority has precedence over experience. My horizon of expectation regarding the medieval period includes the preunderstanding that the institution of marriage relies on male authority. Such authority is based on the assumed rationality of the male as opposed to the emotionality of the female. The whole Marriage Group represents a debate over the supposed merits of this convention, and the outcome impresses upon me either the foresight possessed by Chaucer or the relatively modern outlook allowed by the text.

The view of rationality as a masculine trait and passion as a feminine trait is an historical and social norm for the medieval period, part of the repertoire for The Canterbury Tales. This norm is promoted in the Prologue to the Wife of Bath's tale, and so is textual as well as historical. The Wife of Bath begins by asserting that "Experience, though noon auctoritee/ Were in this world, is right ynogh for me . . ." (III.1-2). Her apologia, which is not really an apology, is consistent with her description in the General Prologue and is substantiated by the rest of her autobiographical prologue. Moreover, her assertion

reinforces my expectation regarding her feminine characteristics and the value attached to them. However, my expectation is mediated when she tells her tale, for it contradicts her credo by appealing to authority. In the first place, her tale is not stylistically original; it is formulaic, relying on the authority of a received canon. In addition, the tale is about a search for an authoritative answer to a problem. The fact that the old crone is an authority figure further disrupts my expectations, since females are not generally accepted as authority figures in this historical period. In fact, in a brilliant treatment of the medieval topic of the-world-turned-upside-down, Chaucer presents several of the female figures in the tales as representatives of authority, while relegating the male figures to the role of buffoon or malevolent presence.²⁰ For example, in the Clerk's Tale patient Griselda is elevated by Walter's passion and irrationality. This relationship is excessive in depicting Griselda's submission and Walter's dominance, and it is juxtaposed against the Merchant's Tale. Yet this tale is also excessive; January is depicted as a dotard, and May is the dominant figure. A balance is struck in the Franklin's Tale, wherein Dorigen can be seen as both passionate and noble.

The fluctuation of perspective contained in this group causes me to alter my horizon of expectation frequently. At first I suspect that Chaucer upholds contemporary social values through his characterization of the Wife of Bath; she stolidly prefers experience over authority, and so reinforces the supposition that women are passionate creatures who should be guided by more rational males. Yet in her tale the Wife of Bath appeals to authority, even relies on it. Perhaps this reversal simply points up her inconsistency without undermining the value of

authority. But then her authority figure is a female, and I begin to wonder if Chaucer might be undercutting exclusively male authority in favor of a more enlightened, advanced humanism which recognizes female authority as well. The arrangement of the remaining tales suggests that Chaucer seeks moderation in the institution of marriage and the way it is perceived; neither party should be dominant, but instead should cooperate. While I can only speculate, I suspect (based on readings in other medieval works) that Chaucer's position is radical. His subversion is subtle because he has chosen to destabilize existing social beliefs through irony, which requires acquiescence from the reader in order to be recognized. His use of structural irony assures that even an obtuse reader, one who is wholly literal-minded, will perceive that several points of view are offered, and so must choose among them. Such a reader may, of course, choose the familiar position, but the likelihood is less certain. For me, the modern reader, this activity is academic, for I am imbued with the kind of humanism which Chaucer anticipated. Yet I too am changed, for now I perceive the conditions of reception for The Canterbury Tales differently, and I perceive Chaucer more completely in his otherness from his contemporaries.

The theme of authority versus experience is further parodied in the Tale of Melibee, in which the customary roles of man and woman are completely reversed--Melibeus is headstrong and passionate, while his wife Prudence is calm and dispassionate, and musters countless authorities to dissuade her husband from revenge. Furthermore, the structure of this tale in juxtaposition with the preceding rhyme of Sir Thopas is an elaborate literary joke that calls into question the nature of art and its place in the world. In the first place, the Host calls for

"som deyntee thyng" from Chaucer (VII.711), but instead he is obliged with a galloping story of a young knight-errant. Even to my relatively inexperienced eye, this fragment seems hopelessly inept, especially as it comes supposedly from Chaucer. The internal structure of this tale strikes me as ironic in that its form is so obviously defective. As W. W. Lawrence observes, "every ridiculous feature of the tenth-rate romance is exploited with glee--its exaggerations, its love of insignificant detail, its capacity for consuming hours in 'passing a given point.'"²¹ The tale is so bad that the Host, whose aesthetic judgment is not of the highest order, is reduced to commenting, "Thy drasty ryming is nat woorth a toord!" (VII.930) Chaucer then proposes to tell a "litel thyng in prose . . . a moral tale vertuous . . ." (VII.937, 940). He articulates themes that have already occurred, such as the need for authority and the concept of variety, and then asks pardon if his next tale is terser than the commonly heard version. By now I expect something brief and pithy, but like many other expectations, this one too is doomed to disappointment.

The Tale of Melibee is ironically indeterminate on a grand scale; it is not "litel" by any means. In fact, it might be a retaliation against the Host (and any readers like him) for his boorish behavior toward Chaucer. I have already noted the reversal of roles (a variation on the world-turned-upside-down topic), but the very structure of the tale demands attention. It begins quite tersely, and the action is swift and precise. However, as soon as Prudence begins to speak, the action comes to a grinding halt. Her first reference to authority is to Ovid's Remedy of Love, "where as he seith/ 'He is a fool that destourbeth the mooder to wepen in the deeth of hire child, til she

have wept hir fille as for a certein tyme;/ and thanne shal man doon his diligence with amyable wordes hir to reconforte, and preyen hire of hir wepyng for to stynte" (VII.975-977). I perceive this allusion as inappropriate to the tale's context, for it controverts the tale's situation, so I proceed warily. What I discover is a dizzying verticality of authorities, piled higher and higher, which impedes any action at all. I may have been familiar with the appeal to authority as a feature of a text, but here it seems to be the subject. Perhaps Chaucer is reasserting the precedence of authority over the earthly experience of the Host. But is an excess of authority necessarily desirable? Perhaps, then, Chaucer is compelling me to question the efficacy of this use of authority and its role in narrative art. On a larger scale, particularly in light of a juxtaposition of Sir Thopas and the Tale of Melibee (or of the complete tales and the Retraction), Chaucer is confronting me with the problem of art's function in the world. Is art a source of authority, or is it to be rejected as mere craftsmanship? For that matter, is experience a valid source for authority? These questions occur to me as I complete my second reading, and I prepare to seek their answers in a third reading of the text, a reading which should allow me to escape from my own partiality into an actualization of "whole meaning."

Applying The Canterbury Tales: A Third Reading

The foundation for the third reading has already been established in the second reading, in which I have speculated about contemporary expectations, literary tradition, and historical as well as social situation. From the perspective of this third reading I should be able, as Jauss proposes, "to recognize through the explicit separation of the

past and present horizons of understanding how the meaning of the poem has unfolded itself historically in the interaction between effect and reception."²² In this reading I can profitably encounter one more ironic mode in The Canterbury Tales--philosophic irony--and then formulate a general response to the work. This mode more than any other is dependent on the text's contemporary conditions of production and reception. For example, studies of The Knight's Tale have emphasized the tale's philosophical dimension and multiple perspectives. And of the comic tales Owen says, "the fabliau, as it took new form under Chaucer's compelling interest in characterization, brought him up against problems of morality that were to become basic in the developed Canterbury Tales."²³ Furthermore, studies of the Retraction, in which its genuineness and relevance are debated, depend on a philosophical dimension. In fact, one might claim that all of the preceding modes of irony rest on this most fundamental mode.

Philosophic irony in The Canterbury Tales involves two basic perspectives: one is earthly, time-bound and limited, while the other is celestial, timeless and limitless.²⁴ I detect this dialectic operating throughout the Tales: two kinds of love, profane and sacred, are represented in General Prologue (the Prioress embodies both, while other characters fall into one category or the other); the limited vision of the characters and the larger vision of the poet are contrasted. The earthly, limited vision discerns such various forces as fortune and destiny and stars, then struggles to relate them to free will and the "purveiaunce" of God. Against this limited vision, the larger vision directs the ironies down to man and his merely natural activities. My participation is virtually assured at this stage because of my

membership in the human community. As a human being, I reveal my limited vision in the presuppositions with which I initially approach the text. Chaucer's contemporary reader might have revealed that limited vision by accepting fate or stars as guidance systems, and my presupposition inclines me to expect that Chaucer's view will be similar to that of his contemporary reader. Of course, this expectation is disappointed by the author's subversion of those values or beliefs. On the other hand, the contemporary or modern reader can also participate in the larger vision because Chaucer invites him or her to restructure experience. In other words, I share with Chaucer the limitless vision and the position of primus inter pares because I recognize the ironies, either initially or upon reflection. From this perspective the ironies tend to be objective rather than self-directed; they turn on the difference between ignorance and knowledge, false love and true love--"the general conflict between the apparent and the real."²⁵

Through the mode of philosophic irony Chaucer makes his greatest demands on the interpretive powers of his audience, contemporary and modern. The contemporary audience no doubt was more familiar with the conventions and values undercut by Chaucer's irony, but they might also have been less attuned to that irony or might have received it differently. Still, philosophic irony calls upon the poet and the reader to share temporarily certain assumptions and feelings such as that authority is preferable or that the text is a stabilizing force. Simultaneously, philosophic irony requires that the poet and the reader entertain certain doubts and uncertainties such as that experience displaces authority or that the text destabilizes a reader's experience. This

collaboration in deciphering the indeterminacies of the text constitutes a fusion of horizons which is critical to this stage of the hermeneutic process. I recognize the challenge to my horizon of experience constituted by the horizon expressed by the author and consequently perceive the restructuring expected of me. If this process is not activated, the author is likely to be presenting directly from within an intellectual context what I am viewing ironically from without; conversely, the author may be presenting obliquely and skeptically what I receive as direct.²⁶ My appreciation of Chaucer's complexity and integrity of vision depends on the successful fusion of our horizons, just as a contemporary audience's appreciation might have been dependent on similar concerns.

So far it may appear as if I am attempting to reconstitute the contemporary audience's responses. Such a reconstitution is not entirely possible, but I can gain some understanding of the intellectual climate surrounding Chaucer by considering works with which his contemporaries might have been familiar. Such an examination establishes The Canterbury Tales in the canon of medieval literature by seeking its analogues and its probable effect on the medieval audience. Of course Chaucer appropriated many genres for his work--courtly romances, fabliaux, moral exempla, to name a few. His contemporary audience would no doubt be familiar with such works. But Chaucer innovatively treats these familiar genres, first by assigning them to a series of characters in a fragmentary narrative, and then by rendering them ironically. He performs the same function when he ironically assigns certain values to inappropriate characters. What the contemporary audience might have experienced was a sense of disorientation and a

sense that a new art form was evolving. Compounded of disparate genres, and validating diffuse and often opposing points of view, The Canterbury Tales represents a movement toward something new, both in form and theme. Its form suggests that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, that the complete narrative is more significant than each of its constituent tales. Its theme reflects the confluence of perspectives in the whole, and the irony accommodates the confluence by withholding final judgment on any single perspective. In the end, the contemporary audience cannot be certain whether authority or experience is to be valorized, if sacred or profane love is to be celebrated. In effect, the contemporary audience must restructure or enlarge its view of experience to accommodate this indeterminacy, a process which is fundamentally humanistic.

As a modern reader, I go through a similar experience of restructuring and enlarging, but my experience includes an historical dimension. Now I must resituate The Canterbury Tales in respect to the canon of medieval literature. I now perceive the work's structure and theme, as well as its reliance on irony, as innovations in the revised literary tradition. The work begins to look toward the modern tradition due to its stylistic and humanistic proclivities. My sense of the newness of The Canterbury Tales differs from that of the contemporary audience because I can see not only what it evolves from but what it evolves into. I can see the work in place on an historical continuum. My understanding and interpretation of the irony in Chaucer's work has caused me to recognize the work's capacity to undercut existing norms before compelling a restructuring of experience. And by extension, I am able to use this literary communication with the past to measure and

to broaden the horizon of my own experience vis-à-vis the experience of the contemporary audience expressed in the text. Consequently, I reformulate my expectations and beliefs following the clues provided by Chaucer, and the larger harmony of the work begins to take form, a larger harmony that I might have intuited previously, but which is now substantiated by my experience of the text.

What is that larger harmony? I might ask more precisely: What is the "whole meaning" of The Canterbury Tales? If I accept Iser's phenomenological view, I conclude that the reading is a reflection of "the structure of experience."²⁷ In other words, my experience consists of balancing competing voices and sub-perspectives: To whom should I listen? Is authority or experience the best guide? In The Canterbury Tales, the Wife of Bath sets experience against "autoritee"; the Miller sets natural instinct and cunning against idealizations of human conduct; the pilgrims are brought forth both by Spring and the call of the martyr; Chaucer himself sets the demands of his art against the demands of religion. The competition of voices, the variation of perspectives, is undeniable. The Miller's Tale does not negate The Knight's Tale; each is unquestionably present. Both are integral parts of the whole, just as each perspective is a part of the whole of experience. And in the end, the author cannot simply refine himself or his work out of existence through his Retraction, the aesthetic equivalent of paring his fingernails. There is a controlling force uniting my experience, both of the Tales and in itself. That affirmation of a richly varied and fundamentally harmonious existence seems to be the meaning of The Canterbury Tales.

In Retrospect

I have arrived at this point through the threefold hermeneutic process of understanding, interpretation, and application. This process also approximates a dialectic exchange as well as a phenomenological analysis. In the first stage, that of understanding the work as an aesthetic object, I approach the text with a preunderstanding, a set of expectations that comprise a natural attitude. This natural attitude is based on my previous experiences with texts similar to this one. During my initial reading I encounter the otherness of the text, its difference from similar texts, as well as the disparity between its record of experience and mine. This understanding is due in part to ironic modes of expression, and it reveals the distinct horizons of experience of myself and the text; the result is an epochē, a suspension of my natural attitude. My goal, then, is to penetrate the otherness of the text so as to unite our respective perspectives, to fuse our horizons, so that I may restructure my experience and enlarge it to accommodate Chaucer's perspective. I am, in fact, compelled to do so by Chaucer's use of irony as a destabilizing force which breaks down my presuppositions regarding the text.

The second stage of reading, that of interpretation, permits me to examine the manner in which Chaucer draws me into his world of experience. By analyzing the various modes of irony and their effects on me, I begin to grasp the underlying themes which require recodification. This reading roughly corresponds to the phenomenological description, which is immediate and limited to my point of view, and in which my experience is clarified by association with other experiences. In the case of The Canterbury Tales, my experience of ironic passages is

clarified by my recollection of previous ironic passages; my reading is further modified by my anticipation that a particular passage will conform to an established pattern. But my recollection is not limited to this text, for once I am informed of the canonical nature of this text, I will also associate its use of various topoi, such as affected-modesty and the-world-turned-upside-down, with the models themselves. Consequently, I will perceive the ironic manner in which Chaucer treats them. Through this process of association I find the world of the text expanding, and my world expanding with it, for the text is now a part of my world. However, I am still somewhat constrained by my personal perspective, and I seek a means of actualizing a meaning which reveals the work's inherent unity.

I find that means in the third reading, the moment of application, in which the work stands forth in its historical nature. At this stage I consider the historical conditions of the work's reception, thereby escaping from the purely personal perspective. My reconstitution of those historical conditions is speculative, based on my understanding of the work's novelty, but it enables me to expand my experience to encompass that of the poet and his audience. I am simultaneously disappointed and invited to assuage the disappointment through the historical nature of the text; as an immediate reader I am excluded, but as an historical, reflective reader I am included in Chaucer's game. This stage approximates the transcendental analytic of phenomenology, for herein I become aware of the whole experience of the text, its arcing out into the past as well as into the present; as a result, my perspective grows to encompass the entirety of the experience. In the process, I discern the larger harmony which unites the individual

tales and the reception of them. That harmony may not be significantly different from my humanistic presuppositions which guided my first reading. However, in having moved through these successive readings I have enlarged and restructured my experience of The Canterbury Tales, and as reading reflects the structure of experience, such an outcome seems inescapable.

NOTES

¹ See Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 513-517; and Wayne C. Booth, A Rhetoric of Irony (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

² Burke, p. 514.

³ Burke, p. 516.

⁴ Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 53-103. Iser qualifies his distinction by pointing out that the repertoire is neither a reflection of nor a deviation from such extratextual realities; rather, it is a textual transformation which recodifies the incorporated system.

⁵ Iser, p. 72.

⁶ Iser, p. 85.

⁷ Iser, p. x.

⁸ Iser, The Implied Reader (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), pp. xii-xiii.

⁹ Iser, "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response," in Aspects of Narrative, ed. J. Hillis Miller, Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 10.

¹⁰ Vance Ramsey, "Modes of Irony in The Canterbury Tales," in Companion to Chaucer Studies, ed. Beryl Rowland (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 292.

11 H. Marshall Leicester, Jr., "A General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales," PMLA, 95 (1980), 216.

12 Geoffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, in The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1961), I.118. All further references to this work are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

13 Ramsey, p. 295.

14 Ramsey, p. 296.

15 E. Talbot Donaldson, "Chaucer the Pilgrim," PMLA, 69 (1954), 928-936.

16 Ernst Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. W. R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 83.

17 For a review of this debate, see James D. Gordon, "Chaucer's Retraction: A Review of Opinion," in Studies in Medieval Literature, ed. MacEdward Leach (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), pp. 81-96.

18 Judson B. Allen, "The old way and the Parson's way," Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 3 (1973), 256ff.

19 Ramsey, p. 300.

20 For discussion of the world-turned-upside-down topic, see Curtius, pp. 94ff.

21 W. W. Lawrence, "Satire in Sir Thopas," PMLA, 50 (1935), 89.

22 Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 170.

23 Charles Owen, "Morality as a Comic Motif in The Canterbury Tales," College English, 41 (1955), 226.

24 Ramsey, p. 302.

25 Ramsey, p. 302.

26 Ramsey, p. 303.

27 Iser, The Implied Reader, p. 291.

CHAPTER 6
THE AESTHETIC METAPHOR
AS A MEDIATING DEVICE IN HAMLET

Hamlet is a problem play. It is not a problem play due to our difficulty in assigning it to a genre, as Measure for Measure or The Winter's Tale are problem plays. Hamlet is undeniably a tragedy. Still, controversy surrounds the play. Is it "undoubtedly a failure" as T. S. Eliot judges, or one of literature's great artistic triumphs? If it is a triumph, does it belong to the highest order of tragedy? If it is a great tragedy, should its protagonist be seen as a man of superb moral sensibility or as an egomaniac? Whatever our judgment is, we find Hamlet an enduring work, and customarily we call such works "great." But is custom the final arbiter in questions of canonical stature? Maynard Mack suggests that great plays "present us with something that can be called a world, a microcosm--a world like our own in being made of people, actions, situations, thoughts, feelings and much more, but unlike our own in being perfectly, or almost perfectly, significant and coherent."¹ Mack's suggestion touches on those features--likeness and otherness--which draw us into the aesthetic reflection of a work. But how are these features communicated to us? In The Canterbury Tales Chaucer uses irony to guide our response; in Hamlet Shakespeare uses, among other devices, the "aesthetic metaphor" to guide our response. This device (or series of devices) initiates the dialogue which is constituted by our successive readings of the play.

The concept of the "aesthetic metaphor" had its modern origin in Lionel Abel's efforts to find a name for an emerging form. Abel coined

the term "metatheatre" to describe a dramatic genre that goes beyond drama, becoming an antiform in which the boundaries between the play as a work of self-contained art and life are dissolved; he refers specifically to the plays of Beckett, Pirandello and Ionesco.² James Calderwood appropriates the concept but expands it into "metadrama," referring to the use as theme of the dramatic art itself--"its materials, its media of language and theater, its generic forms and conventions, its relationship to truth and the social order."³ Calderwood succeeds in including a great deal of classical drama under his rubric, considering any play which seems self-consciously dramatic as metadramatic. His usage also supersedes Ann Barton's identification of "the idea of the play" as a theme in Shakespeare's drama.⁴ Finally, Sidney Homan refines the term into the form I adopt when he writes of "the aesthetic metaphor" in Shakespeare: "The playwright finds metaphors in the very process of his composition, in our awareness of his role as overseer, in the language itself, in the relation of something as theoretical as words to the physical realities of the stage."⁵

Generally, then, the aesthetic metaphor--metadrama--describes the practice adopted by some playwrights of turning to the theatre itself and its informing practices, images, and devices, for clues that point the audience toward certain interpretations. Like irony, this strategy can be compared profitably with the process of defamiliarization codified by the Russian formalists in the early twentieth century. As we observed earlier, the process of defamiliarization results in phenomenological gaps of indeterminacy which invite or compel the audience to participate in an attempt to close the gap by restructuring experience. When a writer defamiliarizes an act or idea, he or she does so against

the background of some literary tradition or social convention; by violating that tradition or convention, the writer calls attention to certain values or beliefs and forces the reader to reassess those values or attitudes toward those values. Metadramatic moments can be seen as moments of defamiliarization in which the playwright "lays bare," or exposes, the theatrical devices on which the work relies. This exposure creates the effect of a Heideggerian gap in equipmentality: by calling attention to the "tool," the playwright makes us aware of its utility and our reliance on it. Similarly, the artist forces us to reassess the values and beliefs determining the use of the device. Thus the playwright and the audience collaborate; the reader carries on a dialogue with the text in an effort to learn the text's "truth."

One particular metadramatic "tool" used in facilitating an active reading of Hamlet is a plurality of directorial voices. Homan suggests that besides originating in the playwright and the inner world of the play, aesthetic metaphors also arise from the profession of acting and from the audience.⁶ The plurality of directorial voices is an aesthetic metaphor which originates with the outer world of the play, its production as play. As such it can be considered a variation on Barton's notion of the Player King, the ruler conscious of playing a role (such as Claudius).⁷ Much has been written regarding Hamlet's consciousness of himself as actor; we may also see him as conscious of his role as a director of the "play" in which he takes a part and which, to some extent, he has written. He is, to adapt a term of Barton's, a "Player Director." Such role-playing is not altogether unprecedented; in A Midsummer Night's Dream Oberon, Bottom, and Theseus all occupy the director's chair at one time or another, and in Love's Labor's Lost

the King and the Princess both assume directorial authority. In Hamlet the competition is compounded because five principal voices direct the action. Occasionally these voices contradict one another, and their claim to control is then problematic. The ghost of Hamlet's father, Hamlet himself, Polonius, Claudius, and Horatio all give direction at one time or another. Moreover, their directions are not always consistent with what we might expect to be the values upon which the play is based. The tension which arises from this plurality, both between the characters and between the play and the audience, constitutes Hamlet's metadramatic superstructure, much as the tension between poetic and dramatic language makes up the focus of Richard II. As Calderwood points out, "each play generates its distinctive metadramatic tension."⁸

In the succession of readings that we shall now undertake, the tensions caused by the plurality of directorial voices provokes a response similar to that provoked by irony in The Canterbury Tales, the response of frustration and subsequent resolve to restructure experience, both textual and lived. We should bear in mind that these readings are just that, readings, and so tend to ignore such theatrical qualities of Hamlet as staging and lighting. We can concentrate only on the literary text, and such a focus might seem unfair to Shakespeare's spirit. However, as canon, Shakespeare's plays are read far more often than they are performed, and so it seems reasonable to codify that process of reading. That demurrer aside, I once again don the mask of the composite reader so as to trace the hermeneutic paths of understanding, interpretation, and application.

Understanding Hamlet

Shakespeare's play carries with it many presuppositions regarding social and aesthetic values, so it will provide many possibilities for indeterminacy. But in this first reading, I am solely concerned with the hermeneutic aspects of poiesis, aesthesis, and catharsis, which lead me toward an understanding of the work as an aesthetic object. As in my first reading of The Canterbury Tales, I recognize that this play functions as a voice from the past. Again, I perceive that this text is not only a manufactured object, but is also an expression of the author's lived experience. As such it is bound to reveal certain verities in an established fashion. The substance and the style, I expect, will reflect values and beliefs of the early seventeenth century, values regarding society, politics, and art, among other things. I also anticipate that this play will follow certain conventions regarding act and scene division, characterization, and language. Finally, I trust that this text will express its truths differently than some contemporary treatise on philosophy. Some of my expectations are upheld, but others are disappointed, and so I am led from poiesis to aesthesis.

While I am reading this play, aware that its mode of production is unique, I also participate in the play's reception. The world of Hamlet is not my world, although some basis for comparison exists, as Mack points out; familiar character types, thoughts, and beliefs are shared. Still, Hamlet's world (and Shakespeare's) discloses itself to me in its otherness. Despite my anticipatory understanding, the natural attitude with which I approached the work, I now must modify that set of expectations. Specifically, I encounter the plurality of directorial voices in the play; now I must adjust my preunderstanding. I expect

Hamlet to be the controlling voice, but four others commend themselves to my attention. I prepare myself for opposition and indeterminacy, even ambiguity. I also acknowledge the growing number of aesthetic metaphors, and reflect on the appropriateness of the play's plurality to what appears to be its controlling idea. So I restructure my expectations still further--Hamlet is not only a play, a tragedy; it is also a play about playing roles, about appropriating authority, and about the consequences which such actions entail. In other words, my manner of seeing the play is led along by the text; simultaneously, my vantage point shifts and my horizon of experience expands toward that revealed by the text. The text's horizon discloses a world in which courtiers intrigue and conspire, where usurpers appear legitimate, where the separation of being and acting is vague and imprecise. It is an horizon I approach willingly, for I am predisposed to believe that experiencing Hamlet's world will be significant to me.

My belief in the play's significance is validated in the third moment of understanding--catharsis--which involves the communicative aspect of the experience. I expect the play to stimulate my enjoyment through various aesthetic effects, and from this enjoyment I anticipate an enlargement and restructuring of my horizon of experience regarding the world of the play and the world of lived experience. These expectations enable me to seek those strategies which facilitate my aesthetic enjoyment and to savor their effect on me. Particularly, I enjoy Shakespeare's use of the aesthetic metaphor, the metadramatic nature of Hamlet, because I understand that its function is to call attention to the text's theatricality and textuality, as well as to defamiliarize various preunderstandings I have regarding the text and the contemporary

circumstances of its production. Although my first reading may not reveal all of the work's metadramatic moments, I grasp enough of them to understand the text's reliance on them as disruptive and reconstitutive devices. My catharsis, in other words, results from my active participation in the actualization of Hamlet's world, from the change of horizons resulting from my perception of the text as an aesthetic object. The text still engages me in dialogue, though, for its foregrounding of its indeterminacy and reflexivity--through the multiplicity of directorial voices--requires more engagement from me. What does the oscillating structure of authority in this work mean? My second reading demands that I analyze these metadramatic moments in relation to the entire play, so as to more closely approach the whole meaning of Hamlet.

Interpreting Hamlet

My second reading of this play provides me with the opportunity to analyze the problems of Hamlet in an effort to close the gaps of indeterminacy. The first scene of the play creates the necessity of restructuring. While I expect the world of the play to be internally coherent, my first encounter is with a scene of consummate indeterminacy and mystery, communicated with a mood of interrogation. I am accosted by verbal challenges: Bernardo asks Francisco, "Who's there?" Francisco asks Horatio and Marcellus, "Who is there?" Finally, Horatio asks the ghost, "What art thou . . . ?" I infer from these questions and from my prior reading that one of the central problems of this play is the question of identity and certitude. In a larger context these questions point backward (and forward) to the indeterminacy caused by the plurality of voices directing this play-world. While this problem may not disturb Hamlet (he answers only to himself and the ghost), it

does affect him, for he must exist in this world of uncertainty. The plurality of voices also affects me, for I have expected that one voice will clearly dominate the play. What I find in the opening scene is confusion and uncertainty, accompanied by reports of political and moral decline. Whose voice will preside and bring order to the chaos?

I would be justified in expecting the next scene to answer the uncertainty voiced on the parapet, and the second scene initially fulfills that expectation. Whereas Marcellus and Bernardo utter little which is factual, only speculating on what seems to be, Claudius seems prepared to provide what I require and value. He enters the abyss of uncertainty and fills it with speech. And yet, how should I respond to this Player King who has killed his brother and married his queen? Despite being the representative of order and authority, Claudius is contemptible. His speech patterns reveal much in their rhetorical density and obfuscation; while his speech regarding his marriage to Gertrude rambles on, the gist of it can be presented tersely: "Therefore our . . . sister . . . have we . . . taken to wife" (I.ii.8-14).⁹ This rhetoric is directed to a shameful purpose; Claudius' syntax overwhelms and combines ideas whose nature are oppugnant. What Claudius says is overly ordered, as befits the representative of authority, but the "rhythms and rhetoric by which he connects any contraries, moral or otherwise, are too smooth."¹⁰ At first he seemed to be the ideal authority, but now he appears officious and overbearing in his exercise of power and in his "directions" to his "cast." For example, he dispatches Cornelius and Voltemand

For bearers of this greeting to old Norway,
Giving to you no further personal power
To business with the king, more than the scope
Of these detailed articles allow.

(I.ii.35-38)

In short, they are not to depart from the "script" provided by Claudius. He also chides Laertes, "You cannot speak of reason to the Dane/ And lose your voice" (I.ii.44-45). He then turns his attention to Hamlet: "But now, my cousin Hamlet . . . How is it that the clouds still hang on you?" (I.ii. 64-66)

As a Player Director, Claudius in this scene is obsessed with speech. This focus is not surprising when I consider that drama is built around language and its use. Yet Claudius' obsession illuminates a pair of oppositions central to my interpretation of this play. Speech is balanced against silence, and I must find some mediation between them. I recall from my first reading that Hamlet often enjoins characters to silence; indeed, his dying words are "the rest is silence" (V.ii.347). On the other hand, Claudius founds his language usage in the realm of public utterance, and subsequently abuses speech. This opposition leads me to consider another opposition, that between reality and illusion, which is critical to art in general and to this play in particular. In a sense, all contexts are theatrical, thus illusory, in the world of the play. Consequently, the opposition is not so much between reality and illusion as it is between differing visions of reality in the play-world. Claudius' vision of reality is one of Realpolitik in which figures (human and linguistic) exist to be manipulated. But is Hamlet's vision substantially different? The effect of this opposition is what Booth refers to as "an impossible coherence of truths that are both undeniably incompatible and undeniably coexistent."¹¹ This "impossible coherence" manifests itself forcefully in this second scene, and my second reading of the play is in part an effort to resolve the opposition with the help of the play.

In this second scene I confront the possibility that Claudius as Player Director is not ideal; the possibility is suggested by Hamlet's response to the earlier question about clouds, "Not so my lord; I am too much i' the sun" (I.ii.67). The pun here collapses two levels of identity; the sun here is intended as the brightness of Claudius, as well as the illumination of reality, the reality of the court. That this reality is not what Hamlet desires is revealed in his remark to his mother, "'Seems,' madam! nay, it is; I know not 'seems'" (I.ii.76). The reality of the court is false for Hamlet, and he would rather not know this seeming reality. On the other hand, Hamlet's reference to the sun can mean that his role as son of the deceased king places him in an awkward position at court. His difficulty with his role is later compounded when Horatio informs him of the ghost's appearance, "a figure like [his] father." Confronting this potential illusion, Hamlet chooses to treat it as reality and so interrogates Horatio regarding its appearance. He then commands silence by cautioning Horatio against discussing the apparition:

If you have hitherto concealed this sight,
 Let it be tenable in your silence still,
 And whatsoever else shal hap to-night,
 Give it an understanding but no tongue.
 (I.ii.247-250)

This direction is consistent with Hamlet's earlier expressed reticence, his auto-direction, "But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (I.ii.159). Faced with the sordid reality of Claudius' court, Hamlet rejects it; faced with the apparent illusion of the ghost, he embraces it, simultaneously rejecting speech in its facet as public utterance, as part of the court's reality. Meanwhile, I confront this opposition with Hamlet, but with the added perspective of knowing that this is a

play. And the play seems to ask which perspective within the play will ultimately be validated, Claudius' "seeming" reality or Hamlet's perceived reality. The outcome of the play I encountered in my first reading does not prepare me to answer this question.

The play's diffusion of authority expands in the next scene when Polonius assumes his role as Player Director. During the second scene he has revealed the public nature of his utterance in a brief speech, "I do beseech you give him leave to go" (I.ii.61). In this request he observes the outward conventions of courtly protocol. Now, in the third scene, he stages his son's departure, but his flood of language actually impedes the action. Polonius urges Laertes, "Aboard, aboard, for shame!" and then delays his exit by bestowing on him precepts for comportment, several of which are worth close examination:

Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportioned thought his act . . .
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel,
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatched, unfledged courage . . .
Give every man thine ear, but a few thy voice;
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.
(I.iii.55-69)

In many ways this passage is conventional, both in situation and sentiment (as a study of existing precedents would reveal). Polonius depicts the conventional senex who advises his son on how to behave. He dispenses conventional, even stale, advice, and he does so in conventionally balanced periods. His direction is concrete, and he relies heavily on verbs of action--"give," "grapple," "take." So far I have no difficulty interpreting this speech. But what is Polonius really telling Laertes to give or take? Certainly nothing palpable is mentioned; Laertes is advised to give his thoughts "no tongue" (a negation),

grapple friends (to his soul), give attention, and take censure. Barring a few instances of figurative usage, this speech now provides a formidable array of possibilities for interpretation. If Polonius directs Laertes to act, but only figuratively, then what kind of action is significant in the play-world or in my life-world? And in his crowning irony, Polonius advises Laertes, "to thine own self be true" (I.iii.78). Of course Polonius does not regard this advice as ironic, for he is always true to himself in his fashion, but I am conscious of a disparity because Hamlet has already alerted me to the fact that all is not as it seems in his world. Furthermore, Polonius questions Ophelia's belief in Hamlet: "Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?" (I.iii.103) He then directs her, "I would not . . . Have you slander any moment leisure/ As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet" (I.iii.132-134). In other words, he would have Ophelia be untrue to herself. Finally, in a global sense, this play is about identity, about being true to oneself, and Polonius' direction strikes a false note given this context.

Several of the values in the play's repertoire are called into question in this scene. I have already considered the disparity between Polonius' call to concrete action and the figurative objects of that action. But I also need to consider the fact that Polonius' advice is couched in terms of negation. In the previous scene Hamlet had cautioned Horatio to give whatever happens that night "understanding but no tongue." Now Polonius tells Laertes, "Give thy thoughts no tongue," and "reserve thy judgment." Finally, he tells Ophelia not to "talk with the Lord Hamlet." As a Player Director, Polonius seems to value silence in others as highly as he values speech in himself, and

this concern with reticence leads me to wonder just what value speech has in this play-world. Moreover, I am faced with conflicting views of truth. Polonius places undue emphasis on the figurative, the insubstantial, in his advice to Laertes, and he questions the truth of Hamlet's expressed sentiment for Ophelia. In fact, his advice to Laertes, "to thine own self be true," might be construed as advice to dissemble in light of his later advice to Ophelia. I am justified in seeing Polonius as a character so embroiled in the reality of Claudius' court that he cannot recognize his own falsehood, but that view does not wholly dispel my uncertainty regarding the "whole meaning" of the whole play.

My uncertainty is deepened in the next scene, set in the exterior darkness of the parapet. Here Hamlet's directorial authority is pitted against that of yet another Player Director--his father's ghost. At first their confrontation represents the opposition of reality to illusion, for Hamlet exclaims, "Thou com'st in such a questionable shape/ That I will speak to thee . . . O, answer me!" (I.iv.43-45) At first this exclamation appears irrational--if the ghost's shape is questionable, why does Hamlet decide to speak with it? But I have already established that Hamlet's reality is not that of the other principal characters, so his decision to treat the ghost as "Hamlet, King, father" corresponds to his attempts at self-identification. However, his excess of speech is a marked contrast to his earlier reticence, and his torrent of questions--"Say, why is this? Wherefore? what should we do?" (I.iv.57)--intensifies the mood of uncertainty surrounding the scene. His questions are answered by a stage direction, "[Ghost] beckons." It is now the ghost's prerogative as Player Director

to enjoin silence, and Hamlet follows his "blocking" to follow the ghost. The insubstantial ghost merely beckons, thus leaving vague its substantiality for me and for Hamlet.

In the fifth scene the ghost speaks, and so erases any uncertainty regarding its existence, at least so far as Hamlet is concerned. Now the chief opposition is between action and reflection, although the opposition between reality and illusion is an important undercurrent, for I still wonder, as Hamlet did earlier, whether this ghost is a "spirit of health or goblin damned." Why does Hamlet follow the ghost so readily? Hamlet's decision might emblemize the interpretive process by its being an act of faith--he makes up his mind, and I must grant him that choice. Now the ghost directs Hamlet to avenge his murder, but his speech is qualified by an equally strong command to refrain from acting against Gertrude:

Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch of luxury and damned incest.
But howsoever thou pursues this act,
Taint not thy mind, not let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught.

(I.v.82-86)

This qualification is presented in terms of a value system inappropriate to the genre of the revenge tragedy--the ghost forbids vengeance upon Gertrude in specifically Christian terms. Yet the ghost's call for vengeance is a pagan convention. How is Hamlet to reconcile this confusion, and how am I to understand it? This paradox echoes (and refines) a similar problem in the revenge motif of Thomas Kyd's drama The Spanish Tragedy, a probable source for Hamlet. Hamlet is directed to seek revenge, as I expect in a revenge tragedy, but he is also directed to refrain from acting against his mother. Is her offense somehow less heinous? The ghost then ends his direction with the words,

"Remember me" (I.v.91), epitomizing the confusion, for it is a direction but not to action. This scene seems to further undercut the efficacy of passionate action by qualifying it, thereby foreshadowing later indecision and confusion experienced by Hamlet and the audience.

Hamlet's reticence is justified; the ghost has confirmed his suspicions regarding the reality of the court. As he remarks in an aside, "meet it is I set it down/ That one may smile and smile, and be a villain./ At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark" (I.v.117-119). Now he compels Horatio and Marcellus to "Never make known what you have seen to-night" (I.v.144). Not content with their promise, and goaded by the ghost's subterranean rumblings, he urges them to swear not to speak. This negation, this oath of silence, gains credibility and strength when Horatio and Marcellus swear on the sword, which as an emblem of violent action is the very antithesis of speech. This antithetical relationship between word and deed further validates the connection established earlier when the ghost directed Hamlet to act against Claudius but not Gertrude; her conscience may be pricked by words but not by swords. The cumulative effect of these first scenes is disorientation and ambiguity. Is the ghost real? If it is real, is it a "spirit of health or goblin damned"? Is vengeance justified under these circumstances? Is Hamlet justified in commanding silence? What becomes clearer to me as the scenes progress is that two realities are opposed in this play. Hamlet, who is conscious of life as a play, takes the play seriously as a game, while Claudius and the other members of the court take their lives seriously, failing to see life as a game. Thus Hamlet can see and hear the ghost because it is part of his play-world; other characters either cannot hear or see the ghost because as

an illusion it can have no place in their reality. Unfortunately, Hamlet's consciousness of life as a play doubles back on him, "diminishing his vital spirit, his pleasure, and his ability to act positively in this life."¹²

During the second act Hamlet's search for identity and assurance continues, but his vital spirit revives when the players arrive at court, and the scene is a major one in terms of its metadramatic content and phenomenological potential. Hamlet arranges for The Murder of Gonzago to be performed with his additional lines and then speculates on the actor's craft:

Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wanned,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit?

(II.ii.535-541)

He compares himself unfavorably with the actor because in a situation demanding a response, Hamlet "can say nothing." He values the players because they talk truthfully about a reality that the world of Claudius either contradicts or obscures.¹³ In other words, when Claudius speaks of his marriage to Gertrude, he speaks truly, but he constructs such an elaborate rhetorical labyrinth that Hamlet and I suspect that he is trying to fit the fact to his own version of reality. Thus he obscures the reality of his illusion-building. The players, and Hamlet in his "antic disposition," act consistently with their reality, not losing sight of its illusory quality. I need to remember that this ambiguity is part of the aesthetic metaphor; I can then understand that the opposing views of reality and illusion in the play reinforce and reflect the same opposition in my experience. This

relationship enables me to understand Hamlet as a world like my own but not in itself wholly "significant and coherent," as Mack would call Hamlet's world. If it were significant and coherent, I would not have to work at interpreting it.

My collaboration--some might say identification--with Hamlet is codified in his own metadramatic commentary, the speech to the players in III.ii. Critics have often discussed Hamlet's directions without agreeing on their purpose. Perhaps the speech is an actor's handbook of sorts, but a few lines are especially significant in light of the play's opposition of reality and illusion, as well as the phenomenological connection between the play-world and my life-world. Hamlet cautions the players:

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with the special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

(III.ii.16-23)

Here Hamlet, as Player Director, comments on the nature of acting and, by allusion, on the performance of Player Kings such as Claudius and Player Lunatics like himself. A problem with interpreting this speech resides in the word "nature," for it is, to say the least, an ambiguous term. Hamlet probably uses the term as a substitute for reality, but that substitution raises new problems. Whose "nature" is supposed to show in the mirror held up by the actor, Claudius' or Hamlet's? If the mirror reflects Claudius' nature, it will shadow forth insubstantiality; however, Hamlet's nature is avowedly illusory, founded on the concept of the world as play, so will his reflection be any more substantial?

I might construct a third alternative, that the nature alluded to here is a transcendental reality, independent of the individual characters' perceptions--this would be Shakespeare's nature. If I subscribe to the theory that the stage is a metaphor for life, then nature would be transcendently ambiguous, and I could do nothing but posit God as a divine playwright who orders life along his own vision. Such an interpretation is consistent with Hamlet's later resignation to the "special providence" that observes the fall of the sparrow.

Nevertheless, Hamlet encourages the players to "o'erstep not the modesty of nature." The term "modesty" can be read here as freedom from excess, and Hamlet continually cautions the players to be moderate. Ironically, Hamlet's own performance, his "antic disposition," often appears excessive. Yet Hamlet's directions might refer only to the players and their play, not to the larger play Hamlet is improvising. Moreover, if he is to suit the action of madness to the word "mad," his performance does seem to hold the mirror up to nature. But the apparent disparity between Hamlet's own words and deeds provides a partial impetus for his tragic end. He has dismissed the world of "seeming" reality as a "dream" or "shadow" (II.ii.271), but he fails to realize that having identified this world he has not necessarily escaped from its "taint," but must deal with it as it is. Still, he holds on to his theatrical perspective, failing to impose its order on others and so losing control of the action. Although Hamlet successfully "interprets" what he sees, he cannot apply his interpretation, and so succumbs to the paralysis that grips him throughout the first part of the play. The mirror for nature is thus reduced to a small pocket mirror that reflects only Hamlet's uncertainty.¹⁴ I might even suspect that Hamlet's

directions and actions are for a play other than the one being enacted around him; he is conscious of the fact but can do nothing to alter his condition. In that respect he is a tragic hero, but his stature is enlarged by an apparent change of perspective, and that change leads to an ending more poignant than it would be if Hamlet continued assailing his world.

During Hamlet's aborted sea voyage, he apparently alters, and upon his return he appears, in Calderwood's eyes, as a "diminished" man. He is no longer given to futile speculations on the propriety of his actions. He is capable of precipitous action: he consigns Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to the death intended for him. Unlike his earlier murder of Polonius, however, this action is fortuitous and remorseless. This is a far different character from the moping or indecisive Hamlet of the first three acts. Now his wit is drier, he thinks more on mortality, and he seems more willing to follow directions originating in Claudius' world. His resignation is evident in his lines, "Let Hercules himself do what he may,/ The cat will mew, and dog will have his day" (V.i.278-279). Hamlet could be referring to himself as dog, but the likelihood is greater that he refers to Claudius and Laertes. His willingness to fight a duel with Laertes can be seen as fatalistic: "If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come" (V.ii.209-211). These remarks on death's inevitability mark a peaceful acquiescence to the world as it is which Hamlet lacked before; having attained that serenity, Hamlet participates in the staged sword-"play" and dies at an appropriate moment. Ironically, of course, his promise to avenge his father's murder is fulfilled when he does not intend it; he is goaded into

action by the spectre of his own death. It seems as if the conflicting directorial voices have been silenced by some off-stage director, or perhaps their machinations have cancelled out one another.

However, the play is not completed, for Horatio now assumes the role of Player Director. He tells Fortinbras and the Ambassador, "give order that these bodies/ High on a stage be placed to the view,/ And let me speak to th' yet unknowing world/ How these things came about" (V.ii.366-369). Hamlet's "the rest is silence" is answered, and at least two oppositions are reconciled. Silence is succeeded by speech, for Horatio will tell the story "of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts." Inaction is succeeded by action, for Fortinbras, representative of military energy, will now "claim [his] vantage" in the kingdom. The problem which remains to be solved is the opposition between illusion and reality; while Hamlet apparently solved the problem to his satisfaction, I remain poised on the multiple horns of this dilemma. Horatio's resolve to narrate the events points metadramatically to the next performance (or reading) of Hamlet, and so all that transpired would seem to have been an illusion, although undeniably it has been part of my lived experience. If I wish to penetrate further into the problem of Hamlet and actualize a more complete meaning for it, I must undertake a third reading, one which accounts for the play's reception and its application in lived experience.

Applying Hamlet

This play-world of Hamlet is supremely metadramatic, and the play itself can be seen as metaphorical. Having already investigated the effects that individual aesthetic metaphors have on my understanding, I should now consider the effect that the work as a whole has. I am

somewhat constrained here by the generic nature of the work. The meta-dramatic qualities of this work are based on its dramatic nature--it is a play to be performed, and erasing the boundaries of the play very naturally pulls an audience into collaboration. For example, at the end of the play Hamlet speaks of the "mutes or audience" who witness the duel (V.ii.346). His immediate reference to the other characters could be broadened to include us, the larger audience surrounding the stage. Even his asides can be taken as conspiratorial musings which draw the audience into his world. But the text of the play undeniably exists, and even if the text is a corrupt or an incomplete one, it still exists as a presence with which I can establish a dialogue and as an extended metaphor for my world of lived experience. My appreciation of these qualities constitutes an understanding, a fusion of horizons between the world of the text and my world. But my understanding cannot be complete until I can apply the metaphor of the text.

I must begin this examination as I undertake any application of the text, with attention to the contemporary conditions of reception surrounding Hamlet. My attention will be divided between generic and stylistic concerns. On the one hand, I am interested in how this play conforms to the standards of other revenge tragedies as well as how it differs; on the other hand, I am interested in the process by which the play's style, its use of the aesthetic metaphor, draws from me the active collaboration necessary to efface the indeterminacy raised by the metadramatic moments. Through an examination of contemporary conditions of reception I can effect a fusion of horizons congruent with my application. For example, I encounter the aesthetic metaphor of the Player Director and am drawn into uncertainty by the proliferation of

such figures. My uncertainty contributes to a larger problem, the source or validity of authority, which as part of the play's repertoire often is undercut by defamiliarization. How does such indeterminacy fit what I know of the Elizabethan experience? How does it affect me? I may be in a position to sympathize with Hamlet's dilemma, for his world, where reality and illusion are frequently indistinct, is my world as well. Yet as a play-world, Hamlet's world is ultimately coherent; how then can it be a reflection of my lived experience in that sense? In order to arrive at an answer I must seek to formulate a mutual application: my experience (preunderstanding) is brought to bear on Hamlet's experience, while the experience of the play is brought to bear on my experience. This mutuality constitutes the dialogue I conduct with the play.

The generic nature of the revenge tragedy is a critical factor in my analysis of Hamlet as a type and of its reception. Certainly Shakespeare appropriated such sources as François de Belleforest's Histoires Tragiques and Kyd's Senecan revenge play, The Spanish Tragedy. In reviewing earlier representatives of the genre, particularly Kyd's play, as well as references to a dramatic precursor, the Ur-Hamlet, I note several parallels. The most significant similarities are the presence of a ghost demanding revenge, an avenger having doubts which are then removed, assumed madness on the part of the avenger, and the avenger reproaching himself for delay.¹⁵ Yet I perceive that the focus of the typical revenge tragedy was on the achievement of revenge rather than on the enervating effects of self-analysis. Calderwood observes that its form-exploration distinguishes Hamlet from other revenge tragedies; in effect, Shakespeare "de-names" the Ur-Hamlet and The Spanish Tragedy:

Hamlet's self-chastisement, the Ghost's return, the contrasting revengefulness of Fortinbras and Laertes--all the ways in which Shakespeare publicizes the fact of Hamlet's delay--announce in effect to the audience, "What we have here, you see, is the old revenge tragedy form, with its built-in hiatus between the vow to revenge and the act of revenge, a hiatus which is usually obscured but which I pointedly advertise."¹⁶

Thus Shakespeare succeeds in individualizing his drama, and a contemporary audience would probably have found themselves more actively engaged in actualizing the play's meaning than they would have if the play had been typical. However, Hamlet is now a part of the canon of western literature, more so than Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy or the hypothetical Ur-Hamlet. It is no longer different. Yet it is still individual, and my consciousness of its individuality permits me, even compels me, to seek its enduring qualities through dialogue.

A connection exists between this process of individualization and the play's essential aesthetic metaphor. Such individual characteristics are themselves metadramatic, for they call attention to the otherness of the text, its departure from convention. As Calderwood points out, advertisements which call attention to departure from form are "metadramatic, second-level comments incorporated into the play itself. As such, they constitute an individualizing of the genre--perhaps even a subverting of the genre--in the very process of announcing its existence."¹⁷ I do not have to extrapolate much to realize that the same process of defamiliarization is prevalent in the stylistic individuality of the work--its reliance on aesthetic metaphors. A contemporary audience might attend the performance or read the play expecting an orderly, coherent play-world in which the avenging Hamlet fulfills his destiny and restores consistency and health to the blighted

political body of Denmark. Instead, "carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts" are committed. Is Hamlet the agent of these acts? Or is he attempting to rectify these acts? The ambiguity results partly from Hamlet's interjacent position between the conventional form of revenge tragedy and that form's individual treatment in Shakespeare's play. Hamlet's self-consciousness corresponds to the play's self-consciousness as revealed in the aesthetic metaphor. Such reflexivity would have been unique to a contemporary audience; however, it is a convention with which I am familiar. My familiarity does not prevent me admiring Shakespeare's originality, though; it also leads me to consider the wider significance of the play. How does this play escape from ambiguity and indeterminacy into coherence? Moreover, what is that coherence, and how does it affect me as a modern respondent?

I can approach these questions more effectively if I backtrack to my immediate and personal experience of the text--I do not encounter the play-world of Hamlet or Claudius so much as I encounter the play-world of Hamlet. I might then plausibly ask what the plurality of Player Directors means to me or what the opposition between speech and silence means to me; I can only speculate as to what these would mean to a contemporary audience. I am thus engaged in describing my self and the work in terms of their mutual existence, thereby expanding my horizon of experience to encompass the play's horizon. Such an approach is not narrowly subjective when performed by an "ideal" composite reader, for as an individual member of an interpretive community, one who shares interpretive presuppositions, what this reader experiences describes what others experience and have experienced. My individual reading is actually part of a shared reading, one which is

prompted and guided by generations of previous readings. My awareness of this historical matrix allows me to recognize the mutuality of the world of the play and the world of lived experience. I extrapolate from my experience of the play to other experiences, and in that circular movement discover that I am bound to my life-world, subject to the restrictions and limitations of an interpretive system dependent on presuppositions. However, these presuppositions are no longer fancies without foundations; they are, in the Heideggerian sense, anticipatory understanding and, in the Gadamerian sense, an "anticipation of perfection." Having arrived at this point, I am now prepared to address the wider significance of the play.

Traditionally, Hamlet is seen as a tragic hero because he is trapped between violent inclinations and vacillation--he cannot decide to act. But I might justifiably ask why he is trapped. If I subscribe to an Aristotelean theory of tragedy, which argues that the tragic hero acts in accordance with his type under given circumstances, I suppose that Hamlet is trapped by his own nature: vacillation is his hamartia. But the tragedy gathers momentum when Hamlet returns from his sea-voyage as a changed man. Is it then Hamlet's fate to fall? If I pursue the reader-response and phenomenological lines of inquiry, I can postulate an answer. Hamlet confronts a radically opposed view of reality, just as Shakespeare confronts his audience with a radically different version of revenge-tragedy. The view which Hamlet confronts is not open to interpretation through his presuppositions of the world, and Shakespeare's audience faces a similar dilemma with respect to this tragedy and their presuppositions. Hamlet is conscious of the theatrical nature of experience, but in Claudius and the court he encounters

an equally powerful view of reality which is also based on theatricality. Similarly, the audience familiar with The Spanish Tragedy and other revenge-tragedies knows the conventions but finds them used in radically different ways in Hamlet. Hamlet's dilemma is compounded because Claudius' view of reality is not self-conscious and so is "false," while Hamlet's view is self-conscious and so is "true," just as Hamlet is a self-conscious play which calls attention to its individuality, thus claiming to be "true." Hamlet's actions are consistent within his view of reality, but seem inconsistent because of the opposition in the play. He can pass judgment, but he cannot act on that judgment, just as the audience cannot act on its judgment that Hamlet is a different kind of tragedy; more precisely, it is already committed to action by striving to interpret this new form. By the end of the play Hamlet has resigned himself to his situation of ambiguity, giving over interpretation to providence and Horatio; similarly, the audience resigns interpretation to the experience of the play. Yet this resignation is not fatalistic, for in the decision to let interpretation happen there lies a recognition that other forces--presuppositions, interpretive communities--determine the direction and outcome of interpretation. Neither is Hamlet's resignation fatalistic, for in his transformation from apprentice avenger to "diminished man" he apparently accepts his limitations as interpreter. His diminution is thus paradoxically an elevation. As Homan suggests, "seeing one's world for what it is still cannot obscure the fact that one must also deal with it, live in it--for what it is."¹⁸ Similarly, although I see the world of Hamlet as radically indeterminate through its aesthetic metaphors, I must still deal with it, and its final metadramatic moments

uphold the play's meaning. While Hamlet's "the rest is silence" would seem to point to the meaning, life goes on. Horatio will narrate the events for a future audience, and Fortinbras will govern. Hamlet may be elevated above the play's other characters, but not as a figure for emulation; the audience must be less because it must endure.

In Retrospect

In closing my interpretation I return to Maynard Mack's assessment of a great play as one which presents a world "like our own in being made up of people, actions, situations, thoughts, feelings and much more, but unlike our own in being perfectly, or almost perfectly, significant and coherent." Hamlet is a great play, but I think we are justified in asking whether Hamlet's world is quite as significant and coherent as Mack seems to assert. Certainly the play-world is coherent in an aesthetic sense, but my view of that world is disordered by intrigue, mystery, and tension, from the opening "Who's there?" to the closing tensions between speech and silence, action and inaction. We may agree with Mack that Hamlet's world is "easily the most various and brilliant, the most elusive" of all of Shakespeare's play-worlds.¹⁹ However, we must emphasize the elusiveness of that world, for Hamlet is a play founded on indeterminacy. Does that indeterminacy prevent the play from projecting a meaning, from being "significant and coherent"? Given the play's secure position in the canon of western literature, Mack's assessment appears legitimate, if not entirely accurate. But let us grant that legitimacy and examine its truth: how is Hamlet significant, and how it is coherent?

The play-world is significant through its capacity to initiate the kind of active reading I have engaged in for the last several

pages. The play-world has the capacity to illuminate those features which are consistent with features in my own experience--people, actions, situations, thoughts, and feelings. The play-world illuminates these features through the aesthetic metaphors it manipulates; by calling attention to the theatricality and hence the un-"reality" of these features, the play-world draws me into a reexamination and possibly a restructuring of my view of these features as they occur in my experience. The resultant enlargement and restructuring of my horizon of experience helps constitute the significance of Hamlet's play-world. Admittedly, the enlargement and restructuring to some degree will be determined by my presuppositions regarding the play, but according to a hermeneutically circular line of reasoning, previous interpretations of the play will affect my presuppositions. The canon affects preunderstanding, creating a natural attitude toward the text, and this attitude affects interpretation.

How, then, is the play-world of Hamlet coherent? Amid its cacaphony of directorial voices and their respective views of reality and illusion, how do I find one voice to heed? I believe that the one voice is the transcendent director, the playwright. Just as Chaucer's voice controls and cements the pilgrims' voices, so Shakespeare's voice directs his Player Directors' voices. Hamlet finds "rest" in the thought of a special providential force that shapes our ends, and that force manifests itself in the action of the play. Moreover, the negation so restlessly expressed in the play-world and so relentlessly not-acted as itself negated when Horatio agrees to narrate the events of the past several hours. Similarly, that promise of narration carries with it the promise of future performance; in effect, Horatio revives speech just as Fortinbras revives action. These rebirths do not negate Hamlet or his

views; rather, they confirm him as a tragic hero, for his struggles to resolve conflicting values are indeed heroic. In another sense, the revival of speech guarantees Hamlet's rebirth, for he lives in the narration and performance. Thus the playwright demonstrates his authority and power as a transcendental director through the form of the play-world. The coherence of that play-world is, finally, a function of its aesthetic form.

If we need a final, succinct assertion of meaning, I suppose it must be that my experience of this play's form is its meaning. The play-world of Hamlet is a celebration of control, order, and coherence, of balance and counterbalance, despite its apparent indeterminacy. My dialogue with the text, through successive readings, reveals moments of instability and negation, surprise and disappointment. Nevertheless, my whole experience is coherent. At the end of the play order is restored, speech and action are revived, and reality is revised. These effects are not achieved through the agency of Hamlet as Player Director, but through the agency of the playwright as transcendent director. And just as Hamlet finds solace in the thought of a special providence that directs the actions in a play-world, I too find solace in the thought of that controlling force valorized in my experience of that world and, quite possibly, in my lived experience as well.

NOTES

¹ Maynard Mack, "The World of Hamlet," in Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Leonard F. Dean (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 237.

² For a more comprehensive discussion of these origins, see Lionel Abel, Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963).

³ James L. Calderwood, Shakespearean Metadrama (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p.5.

⁴ Ann Barton Righter, Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967).

⁵ Sidney Homan, When the Theater Turns to Itself (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1981), p. 11.

⁶ Homan, p. 12.

⁷ see Righter, pp. 102ff.

⁸ Calderwood, p. 19.

⁹ William Shakespeare, Hamlet, in The Complete Pelican Shakespeare, ed. Alfred Harbage (New York: The Viking Press, 1975). All further references to this work are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁰ Stephen Booth, "On the Value of Hamlet," in Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama, ed. Norman Rabkin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 149.

¹¹ Booth, p. 171.

¹² Homan, p. 152.

¹³ Homan, p. 156.

¹⁴ Homan, p. 171.

¹⁵ For a more complete catalogue of parallels, see Geoffrey Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, vol. VII (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 16-17.

¹⁶ Calderwood, To Be and Not To Be (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 28.

- 17 Calderwood, To Be And Not To Be, p. 28.
- 18 Homan, p. 169.
- 19 Mack, p. 238.

CHAPTER 7
NARRATIVE STYLE AS A MEDIATING DEVICE
IN A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN

In the two preceding chapters, one assumption has been that language is the foundation for literature as an art form and as a revelation of lived experience. In this chapter I wish to investigate language itself, specifically consciousness of language, as a means for reflecting an emerging consciousness, thereby provoking the reader to enlarge and restructure his or her own experience. This focus is particularly relevant in reading James Joyce, especially relevant in reading his earliest novel, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. While Joyce's later works Ulysses and Finnegans Wake are richer in linguistic play, A Portrait is more appropriate to this investigation for two reasons. Thomas F. Staley provides one justification when he writes, "Few novels of the twentieth century have reached the level of total acceptability as has A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Its stature is assured, and it is distinguished by its general availability and readability . . . The gap that usually exists between the 'average' reader and the scholar-critic is minimal where A Portrait is concerned."¹ Furthermore, A Portrait is in some ways a novel about language; Stephen Dedalus is a character inordinately sensitive to language, and the work depicts his movement toward the role of artist through a series of narrated observations which stylistically represent his changing perception of language and the world.

Principally, Joyce accomplishes his stylistic representation of emerging consciousness through a narrative technique called narrated

monologue. The technique, which he adapted from the technique of erlebte Rede in the nineteenth-century German Bildungsroman, allows him to show a flow of narration which becomes increasingly complex as the mind of the hero attains greater verbal sophistication.² Many critics have noted this parallelism of development, although they have not always agreed on its significance. R. B. Kershner observes that "as the protagonist develops, the quality of the narrative voice changes also . . . parataxis gives way to hypotaxis."³ Matthew Hodgart chronicles this development in some detail, suggesting that each chapter is written in a style appropriate to the stage of the hero's development.⁴ But what is accomplished through Joyce's modulation of style? How does this technique guide my understanding of the work? My concern in this chapter is with the underpinning of Joyce's version of the Bildungsroman--his view of language as a force shaping the development of an individual character, and, by interpolation, what that view reveals to me about my lived experience. As has been the case with Chaucer's world and Hamlet's world, Stephen's world will engage me in a dialogue brought about by modulations of narrative style, thus compelling me to restructure my horizon of experience regarding the text and my own world of lived praxis.

As a point of departure for this examination, let us consider a passage from St. Augustine's Confessions; given Joyce's Catholic heritage, we may assume that he would be familiar with this passage. Here Augustine considers "the growth of speech" as he recalls his advance from infancy to boyhood and his efforts at learning to talk:

when they named a certain thing and, at that name, made a gesture towards the object, I observed that object and inferred that it was called by the name they uttered . . . So

little by little I inferred that the words set in their proper places in different sentences, that I heard frequently, were signs of things. When my mouth had become accustomed to these signs, I expressed by means of them my own wishes . . . I entered more deeply into the stormy society of human life, although still dependent on my parents' authority and the will of my elders.⁵

Despite the possibility of faulty recollection (always a danger in autobiography or Bildungsroman), Augustine's account of language acquisition raises some interesting possibilities relevant to Joyce's Portrait.

First, the "correspondence-theory" described by Augustine serves as a kind of initiation for the child, and A Portrait as Bildungsroman is a novel about initiation. Second, and perhaps more important, the early period described by Augustine is a severely restricted and restricting one which must be transcended, and A Portrait is a novel about escape. It is the process of escaping the limitations of a correspondence theory that Joyce describes most subtly in the narrative structure of A Portrait; in the terms of Wittgenstein's logical positivism, one language game must be relinquished for another. Through Joyce's description a reciprocal process occurs: as Stephen Dedalus' perception of language evolves, so does the reader's perception. Joyce's novel becomes a double portrait; not only does it show the artist in the process of growing through his developing ability to handle his chosen medium, but it also shows the reader how he or she is developing. To trace this mutual portraiture, I shall once more assume the role of the ideal composite reader and move through a succession of readings.

Understanding A Portrait

Once again I confront the triadic enterprise of poiesis, aesthesis, and catharsis. Yet this time the enterprise is somewhat more

challenging due to the number of precedents for this work. I must first consider this work from the standpoint of its mode of production. I recognize in A Portrait two elements which suggest possible modes of interpretation. It is both autobiography and Bildungsroman. But how is it different? If it were strictly autobiographical I would be justified in expecting a first-person style of narration and a certain amount of authorial intrusion or commentary. It has neither. Its style of narration is third-person, and the presence of the author is implicit, not explicit. Moreover, in comparing the events in the novel with the events in Joyce's life (through such sources as Ellmann's biography) I find that certain liberties are taken with sequence and participants. I surmise that while this novel is partly autobiographical, it is more fictional than factual. Regarding this work's resemblance to such Bildungsromans as Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, I find several similarities. It replicates the development of the hero from boyhood through adolescence, halting the action with the hero poised to begin his later life. The style and structure of A Portrait also resembles the Bildungsroman; the novel is episodic, with each chapter representing a stage in the hero's development. Finally, the narrative line follows the emotional tone of the actions by fluctuating between emotional extremes.⁶ Again this novel seems to challenge me to discover its individuality. Joyce does not so much duplicate the Bildungsroman style as parody it (as we shall see he parodies different styles in each episode). The narrative modulation seems to progress in a series of styles appropriate to Stephen's stages of development, but the emotional fluctuations are excessive, swinging from lyrical zeniths to bathetic nadirs. Is Joyce ironizing the conventional narrative line

of the Bildungsroman? I suspect that this work is far more than an autobiographical novel or a Bildungsroman, and is perhaps far more than a parody of these genres. Perhaps I can approach its essence more closely by examining the mode of reception.

As I attend to the productive aspect of the aesthetic experience, I am also participating in the receptive aspect, that of aesthesis. As I become acquainted with the aesthetic object in its difference, I also encounter a mode of experience that is not natural. Just as the mode of expression is individual (not-autobiography, not-Bildungsroman), so too this view of a represented world discloses itself in its otherness (Stephen's fictional world, not my world of experience). Yet my manner of seeing, led along by A Portrait, opens up to a horizon of experience of a world viewed differently, a world where language controls perception through its progressive sophistication. Concomitantly, I discover in this world a reflection of my world; recalling the Augustinian view of language acquisition, I can see parallels between the world of Stephen and my world. Still, I am conscious of the pervasive otherness of this view, for its mode of expression is fictional--consciously ordered and balanced so as to artificially recreate the effects Joyce wishes to achieve and describe. Moreover, my immersion and participation in this recreation is conscious and voluntary, for my anticipatory understanding of the work's fictional nature predisposes me to engage in this activity.

The third moment of my first reading is its communicative aspect--catharsis. In this moment I acknowledge the enjoyment of aesthetic effects insofar as they affect a change in my perception. As Jauss suggests, this catharsis is a result of my active participation in the

constitution of the imaginary. I enjoy Joyce's revisions of narrative conventions because I am participating in the actualization of meaning through a fusion of horizons, an activity made possible only by the work's characteristic as aesthetic object. Certainly the conclusions I draw from this first reading are incomplete; I recognize that A Portrait is an individual, singular aesthetic object, and I enjoy it for its uniqueness. But this first reading leaves me with more questions than answers. How does the work promote a fusion of horizons? How does Joyce's revision of narrative structure affect me? What kinds of prejudgments and values must I restructure in order to attain a more complete, critical understanding of this work? In short, how can I interpret A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man?

Interpreting A Portrait

I commence this second reading with a generalization previously acknowledged: Hodgart (among others) notes that each section of the novel is written in a style appropriate to a stage in the hero's development. Specifically, the first chapter is written in baby-talk and the naive style suitable for a little boy, although there is a premonition of a more complex style. The second chapter shows a gradual, though not regular, evolution which culminates in romantic-erotic prose. The third chapter is a magnificent piece of rhetoric, but the perception of hell-fire and damnation is somewhat childish. The fourth chapter modulates from the measured prose style of Newman to the more ecstatic style of Pater. The last chapter is written in imitation of late-nineteenth century naturalistic fiction, and the dialogue is modeled on Ibsen.⁷ This synopsis is accurate, but I am justified in asking what the effects are. If a fusion of horizons

is to occur, I must interpret these modulations both singly and contextually; what do they accomplish alone, and what do they accomplish in the context of the whole work? Does the attitude towards language revealed in the chapters of A Portrait display a growing sensitivity to its uses?

As I might expect, the first section seems rooted in the correspondence theory described by Augustine. The vocabulary is virtually monosyllabic, and the sentences are simple—"devoid of syntactical subordination, exemplification, comparison, or any such sophisticated means of dealing with the world."⁸ Language is primary for Stephen:

Once upon a time and a very good time it was
there was a moocow coming down along the road
and this moocow that was coming down along
the road met a nicens little boy named baby
tuckoo . . . (p. 7)⁹

The "story" exists before the sense, as Kershner observes. There is no distinction between sensation and language; in correspondence-theory terms, a thing is what it is named. Stephen's imagery is correspondingly simple and direct; "the brush with the maroon velvet back was for Michael Davitt and the brush with the green velvet back was for Parnell" (p. 7). This rather fundamental approach to language is rendered somewhat sinister when Dante recites her verse, "Pull out his eyes,/ Apologise . . ." (p. 8). The juxtaposition of Dante (a name chosen fortuituously from Joyce's own past) and the verse calls my attention to the net of language, its uncreative use, and also to an irony. Whereas Dante, as author of the Commedia, is a creative user of language, Dante's namesake, Stephen's aunt, is associated with verse of a highly doggerel nature. And although at such an early age Stephen

is more affected by the "story" than by the style of this verse, I am alerted to the future attempts Stephen will make to break free from the net of uncreative, sterile language usage.

Stephen's developing awareness of language manifests itself in several ways in the second section of Chapter I. He displays a reverence for the incantatory property of words in books: "And there were nice sentences in Doctor Cromwell's Spelling Book. They were like poetry but they were only sentences to learn the spelling from" (p. 10). His recitation of the spelling exercise recalls his lisping variation on his mother's song and suggests a desire to classify things, a necessary step in the process of acquiring language. Stephen's interest in the world of language is further revealed in his speculation on the word "suck" and his realization of its onomatopoeic possibilities--the word has qualities which mimic those of the sensory world. He also discovers that names are words and subsequently merge into symbols, an idea with which he will later struggle.¹⁰ He has inscribed on the flyleaf of his geography book "himself, his name, and where he was" (p. 15); Stephen's person and his name are part of an expanding series of phenomena which are also delineated by their names--"Ireland, Europe, The World, The Universe." He next reads the verses inscribed by Fleming, then reads them backwards, "but then they were not poetry" (p. 16). He already has a rudimentary understanding that poetry must have some pattern, but he is still held by a correspondence awareness and so does not grasp the full significance of his understanding. Finally, however, words do evoke strong feelings from him through their own power rather than through the power of their referents; moreover, they reveal strange associations among themselves:

How beautiful the words were when they said Bury me in the old churchyard! A tremor passed over his body . . . He wanted to cry quietly but not for himself: for the words, so beautiful and sad, like music. (p. 24)

This growing complexity of awareness is articulated in the grand style used to describe his vision of Parnell's death, although this premonition is deflated by the simple reportorial style of the last section describing the Christmas dinner.

In Chapter II I encounter more experiences in the life Stephen will reject and the accompanying changes in style. In the first section Stephen accompanies his father and uncle on walks and listens to their conversation about politics with "an avid ear" (p. 62). But his interest in the discussion stems from his preoccupation with language: "Words which he did not understand he said over and over to himself till he had learnt them by heart: and through them he had glimpses of the real world about him" (p. 62). He is still intrigued by the incantatory approach to language awareness, but now the words have another dimension; the words "he did not understand" despite his repetition suggest a net or cage, but by looking through their restraining properties built on unimaginative use, he has occasional intuitions of the wider potential of language. This intuition is realized in a limited and subjective manner in his reading of The Count of Monte Cristo. This romantic tale of an exile appeals to his growing sense of isolation, and its language, which he imitates, enables him to imagine "the bright picture of Marseilles" and the "sunny trellises," as well as Mercedes. (p. 62) In other words, he begins to create his own fiction based on the fiction of Dumas; he begins the process of assimilation and synthesis which leads to his identification with the artificer Daedalus. Yet his efforts are confused for his image is compounded of experience, literature, and the unknown word rooted in his consciousness.¹¹

The futility of his effort is illuminated in the next section when he resolves to write a poem dedicated to Eileen. Extracting what he thinks is the essence of his experience, he writes a poem about the "night moon" and an "undefined sorrow" in the hearts of the protagonists. The effort to express sensation through language is qualifiedly unsuccessful--"there remained no trace of the tram itself nor of the trammen nor of the horses" (p. 70). However, this adolescent composition is partially successful because it allows Stephen to escape the net of a correspondence theory so as to revise experience into a more aesthetic form. My pleasure in Stephen's accomplishment is disrupted by the intrusion of the narrative voice describing Stephen's narcissism; after completing the poem, he gazes at himself for a long time in the mirror of his mother's dressingtable. Although the style is not altered, the tone suggests irony, and I wonder just how seriously I am supposed to take Stephen's groping toward artistic identity. Perhaps language functions both as a sedative and as a connection with external experience. He has combined the schematic (using the headings A.M.D.G. and L.D.S.) with the generalized, and the reaction is a turn inward.

Language in the guise of literature becomes a cause for suffering and punishment in the third section of Chapter II. Stephen recalls the occasion on which he was accused of writing heresy in a school essay. He evaded the charge by revising his words, thus appeasing the instructor, but his classmates Heron, Boland, and Nash corner him and dispute with him the relative poetic merits of Tennyson and Byron. Stephen dismisses Tennyson as "only a rhymster" (p. 80), thus revealing his growing consciousness of some quality more essential than mere facility in poetry. He suffers for his discernment, for he is soundly thrashed by his three

classmates. His suffering persists, albeit in a subtler form, in the fourth section, particularly when he encounters the word "Foetus" carved several times in a desk at his father's alma mater. He is excited and disturbed by the word. Whereas the word "suck" had suggested a sound in purely onomatopoeic terms, this word, occurring as it does in the context of death and mutability, suggests, in purely associative fashion, death and incipient lust: "His monstrous reveries came thronging into his memory. They too had sprung up before him, suddenly and furiously, out of mere words" (p. 90). Here I sense that Stephen's recognition of language's evocative power is becoming stronger, particularly as the style has now attained a turgid, romantic quality. But still this stage of development will be surmounted; to leave Stephen here would prove most unsatisfactory, as it seems incomplete to me.

The evocative power of language is more fully realized in Chapter III, manifested in Father Arnall's sermons and Stephen's reaction to them. While Chapter III is perhaps the least complex and most straightforward chapter of the novel in terms of joining intent and effect of language, it does represent the entirely logical consequence of the experiences presented in the first two chapters.¹² Stephen's comparatively unsophisticated perception of the power of language--he still views it as a vehicle for subjectivism and as a literal expression of external experience--makes him particularly susceptible to the spiritual brainwashing he receives through Father Arnall's sermons. Although he has wallowed in his sins--the narrative description of them is certainly self-indulgent--"the figure of his old master, so strangely rearsen," brings Stephen's mind back to "his life at Clongowes . . . His soul, as these memories come back to him, became again a child's soul" (pp. 108-

109). The child's soul, as described in St. Augustine's Confessions, is inclined to interpret language literally, being unable to distinguish it from sensation; this is Stephen's experience as he listens to Father Arnall describe the physical and mental torments of hell. The sermons themselves are models of rhetorical expertise, abounding in anaphora, antistrophe, ellipsis, and other figures of speech. These rhetorical tropes exhibit balance and rhythm, the two aesthetic virtues which Stephen seems most attracted to in language. The effect of the sermons is thus quite logical: Stephen is so affected by their articulation of sensation that he extrapolates from them a vision of a personal hell inhabited by goatish creatures whose "spittleless lips" utter "soft language" (p. 138). In a paroxysm of dread he vomits and determines to confess, falling back on the incantatory properties of prayer. However, I perceive in this resolution a retreat--just as the sermons appeal to his "child's soul," so too his attempt to atone is an escape to that period in his life when language expressed a correspondence between word and sensation, when language could be learned by repetition and memorization. Yet Stephen has already demonstrated a more sophisticated perception, so I suspect that his repentance will not last.

The first section of Chapter IV, appropriately narrated in imitation of Newman's Apologia, tells of Stephen's devotional exercises and attempts at physical mortification. But he has misgivings and hears voices counsel-ing surrender to temptations of the flesh. At this stage he seems to be abandoning an old language as well as an old stage of life; he feels "regret and pity as though he were slowly passing out of an accustomed world and were hearing its language for the last time" (p. 156). The language Stephen is leaving behind is the soothing, ritualistic language

he associates with the Church.¹³ The feeling of abandonment becomes more pronounced, even final, when in the second section Stephen rejects the religious life after his interview with the director regarding the life of a priest: "The chill and order of the life repelled him" (p. 161). I perceive in this remark a revulsion toward the chill and order of ritualistic language, and this revulsion is balanced by a sense of Stephen's destiny; "He was destined to learn his own wisdom apart from others or to learn the wisdom of others himself wandering among the snares of the world" (p. 162). He turns toward home and, smelling the decay of the kitchen garden, is amused that "this disorder, the misrule and confusion of his father's house and the stagnation of vegetable life" will play a part in the winning of his soul. This bathetic narrative plunge illuminates for me the irony of such disorder becoming the raw material for Stephen's larger, more inclusive view of the world. The juxtaposition also suggests an aesthetic principle--true art cannot divest itself of elemental sensation to align itself solely with beauty.

Stephen's true conversion occurs in the next section, and is articulated in the comparatively ornate style of Pater. As he wanders on the quay, he repeats a treasured line to himself, and then muses over the power of the words: "it was the poise and balance of the period itself." He then questions the pleasure he derives from "the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose" (p. 167). I perceive in this reflection a qualitative difference in Stephen's feelings, and in mine, toward the effect of language. Stephen's consciousness of the evocative power of words is now transferred from the literal "suck" and "Foetus" to the clouds and the sky and their imaginative association with birds. Subsequently he sees

an apparition of his namesake--"a winged form flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air" (p. 169). At the climactic moment of the novel, when he sees the girl standing in the water, he notes that "she seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird" (p. 171). Just as language at its evocative best mirrors the "inner world of individual emotions," so too does this vision mirror the surd, the nameless essence of divine and mortal elements. It is Stephen's task as creator to name and express the "living thing, new and soaring and beautiful, impalpable, imperishable" (p. 170); similarly, it is my task as receptor and co-creator of the text to actualize this expression through interpretation. Stephen's communion occurs when he feels his soul "swooning into some new world," when he imagines a light or a flower "breaking in full crimson and unfolding and fading to palest rose, leaf by leaf and wave of light by wave of light, flooding all the heavens with its soft flushes, every flush deeper than the other" (p. 172). This imagistic passage reveals Stephen's new world of mortal beauty unfolding to him; still, the process is incomplete, for he must explore a final possibility, that of translating his mystical illumination into an aesthetic form. I perceive the incompleteness of Stephen's development, and I await the final stage of his liberation.

The beginning of Chapter V, narrated in the manner of late-nineteenth century naturalistic prose, poses something of a problem. Kershner points out that "Stephen unwittingly prepares for his final attempt at capturing the world in the moment by means of a trancelike sensitivity to raw language, language dissociated from its context and referent."¹⁴ He walks the streets in a strange lethargy, and the shop signs seem to have been "emptied of extraneous sense," voided of any public meaning. His doubts

are "lit up at moments by the lightnings of intuition" (p. 177), but for the most part he feels as if he is walking among "heaps of dead language" (p. 178). This consciousness resembles an epochē, a moment of suspension in his natural attitude, and I wonder if this moment can be transcended. The words about Stephen become unsignifying objects which intrude between experience and his mind: "His own consciousness of language was ebbing from his brain and trickling into the very words themselves which set to band and disband themselves in wayward rhythms" (p. 179). I feel this independence in Stephen's nonsense verse, and the effect is startling: "The word now shone in his brain, clearer and brighter than any ivory sawn from the mottled tusks of elephants" (p. 179). The word reveals its independent existence, and I discover a linguistic correlative to the sensory epiphany at the end of the fourth chapter. The light or flower then had proliferated into many shapes and many colors; now the word blossoms multilingually—"ivory, ivoire, avorio, ebur." This moment leaves Stephen, and me, face to face with the mysterious, transforming word. Will he be able to channel its power, or will he continue to be shaped by it? The next section suggests a possible answer, but one not very satisfactory.

After refusing to sign a petition for universal peace and rejecting Irish nationalism, Stephen goes on to promulgate his creed of "applied Aquinas" to Lynch, who provides a crude counterpoint to Stephen's aesthetic reflections.¹⁵ While Joyce's indebtedness has probably been exaggerated, Stephen's reliance on the doctrines of Aristotle and Aquinas is clear and logical—I perceive that he must have a theory to give form to his intuition. In speaking of rhythm as "the first formal esthetic relation," Stephen articulates a principle which has operated throughout

the novel (I shall discuss this more completely in the third reading). In defining art as the attempt "to express, to press out again . . . from sound and shape and colour which are the prison gates of the soul, an image of the beauty we have come to understand" (p. 207), he expresses his need to escape the chaos of sensation through the unifying, harmonizing force of art. He finally attempts to put his doctrine into practice by composing a villanelle. At this point his religious obsession with language is evident, as in a creative frenzy he feels "in the virgin womb of the imagination the word was made fresh" (p. 217). He perceives the seminal properties of language and views it as a symbol of "the element of mystery." However, the rhythm of this "epiphany" suggests to me that Stephen fails in this attempt at the complete aesthetic experience, for like the image of Emma later,

The verses passed from his mind to his lips and, murmuring them over, he felt the rhythmic movement of a villanelle pass through them . . . And then? . . . The rhythm died away, ceased, began to move and beat. And then? . . . The rhythm died out at once; the cry of his heart was broken. (pp. 217-218)

Stephen completes the poem, but illumination has been replaced by "quiet indulgence." Kershner suggests that here the language which Stephen had hoped "would provide a bridge instead serves as a buffer, a soporific like the words he made to fit the rhythm of the train, travelling to Cork--or, as the language of the poem suggests, like the liturgy."¹⁶ The modulation suggests to me another undercutting, an invitation to see Stephen as still incomplete.

The remainder of Chapter V details Stephen's revulsion against and disengagement from family, friends, Church, country, and implicitly his own approach to art. Stephen abandons the rhapsodical lyricism of the villanelle section, and even indulges in irony, as he describes himself

as self-consciously parodying the Byronic attitude with "the spiritual-heroic refrigerating apparatus, invented and patented in all countries by Dante Alighieri" (p. 252). The pose seems to signal a partial realization of Joyce's own mature attitude, particularly as the narrative style has gone from rather turgid prose to the more concise diary form. Stephen's still-lyrical epigram enunciates the change in attitude most clearly: "The past is consumed in the present and the present is living only because it brings forth the future" (p. 251). This peculiar expression of historical consciousness suggests that Stephen now rejects the past as well as the present of the timeless aesthetic moment. Kershner interprets this moment as "the shift from retrospective to prospective, from a mimetic art which, feeding upon memory, must be past-oriented, to a generative art wherein the godlike artist creates what has not yet come into being: his own image as artist, or 'the uncreated conscience of his race,' for example."¹⁷ I leave Stephen poised at the threshold of his destiny, invoking the aid of the artificer-god to whose condition he aspires. Stephen has successfully escaped the net of a correspondence theory of language and art, and he has begun to formulate the freer imagistic approach; however, I must leave him here, as yet unfulfilled. He can imitate, but he cannot yet create.

During the last few pages I have mentioned rhythm several times and suggested that it is an important element in an interpretation of the narrative structure of A Portrait. I now wish to expand that suggestion to claim that the rhythmic changes of the novel are the signals for revision or restructuring of my understanding. The rhythmic changes, in conjunction with the narrative shifts, disrupt the flow of my reading and alert me to some alteration which needs to be accommodated in my

experience of the text. In A New Approach to Joyce, Robert Ryf argues that the novel's changes in rhythm can be described as "interrupted pulsation." The interrupted pulsations employed in A Portrait are of several kinds: "some serve as transitions, others as points of arrest; some create contrasts that highlight what is before or after; some others create a contrapuntal pattern; and still others, patterns of tension-relaxation or inflation-deflation."¹⁸ This rhythmic fluctuation can also emphasize stages in Stephen's evolving awareness of language, his movement from one level to another, particularly as it corresponds to changes in the narrative style. Many of these changes, these interrupted pulsations, act as gaps of indeterminacy, arresting my progress through the novel and forcing me to revise my interpretation, thus fusing my horizon with that of the text.

The changes of rhythm in the first chapter are easily identified, but their effects require consideration. For example, Dante's little rhyme is followed by an abrupt change of scene to a playground at Clongowes, where Stephen reflects on the word "suck" and on whether green roses are possible. This pulsation suggests to me an escape, not just from threatened punishment, but from a restrictive, uncreative use of language to Stephen's own imaginative use. Such a change suggests to me the direction in which Stephen will move as the novel progresses. However, his excursion into imagination is terminated abruptly by the school bell and his return to the classroom. This pulsation sets up a gulf between the ideal and the real, or the inner and outer reality, a gulf which will manifest itself as a fundamental gap to be closed by Stephen, through his art, and by me, through my experience of the novel. Later, as Stephen prepares for bed, he recalls a line from a prayer:

"Visit, we beseech Thee, O Lord, this habitation and drive away from it all" Thoughts of home and holiday abruptly intrude, but the intrusion seems more like a juxtaposition. "Habitation," a rather colorless word, signifies home and induces thoughts of it. However, the termination of the prayer after the word "all" suggests punishment rather than protection, rejection rather than refuge. Thus this simple device, which could merely replicate Stephen's falling asleep as he prays, expands my interpretive choices. "All" what will be driven away from the habitation? Will the "all" include Stephen? In combination with my first reading, I infer that this is a reference to Stephen's eventual alienation and self-imposed exile.

The narrative shifts make me more aware of the gulf separating Stephen's inner and outer life when the rhythm changes in Chapter II. Stephen realizes his isolation and wishes desperately "to meet in the real world the unsubstantial image which his soul so constantly beheld" (p. 65). In that projected meeting Stephen believes "he would be transfigured . . . Weakness and timidity and inexperience would fall from him in that magic moment" (p. 65). However, his ambitious yearning and my expectation are disappointed when the world of external reality intrudes: "Two great yellow caravans had halted one morning before the door and men had come tramping into the house to dismantle it" (p. 65). The narrative style has signalled this undercutting by changing from rhapsodic and mystical to direct and prosaic, appropriately supporting a mini-exile prepared for earlier in the first chapter. This kind of interrupted pulsation occurs again in Chapter III after Stephen leaves one of Father Arnall's sermons, a model of rhetorical balance and evocative power, and is met by the commonplace observations of his classmates:

"I suppose he rubbed it into you well." In Chapter IV counterpoint emphasizes the contrast between Stephen's soaring imagination and the cruder bantering of his acquaintances: "Eh, give it over, Dwyer, I'm telling you or I'll give you a stuff in the kisser for yourself." Similarly, in his prolonged discourse on aesthetics, Stephen's profundities are interwoven with Lynch's irrelevant and irreverent interruptions and observations.

Confronted by these frequent shifts in narrative tone and style, I question their effects. Are they present merely to deflate Stephen's pretensions and to provide Joyce a mild satisfaction in having progressed so far beyond these quasi-dilemmas? Such a view can certainly be consistently supported, as Kenner demonstrates in his ironic reading of A Portrait. But this view also seems rather one-dimensional in light of the continually growing awareness of language that Stephen displays throughout the novel. Yes, there are lapses, but these can be seen as part of the rhythm of the work, a rhythm which supposedly looks toward a theory (and practice) of art which is composed equally of the crude and the refined elements of life. I suspect that the rhythmic use of counterpoint and juxtaposition reinforce rather than undermine Joyce's portrait of Stephen. Stephen moves from one stage of development to another, but not always smoothly; sometimes he falls back, and sometimes he is dragged back. Yet his movement is inexorably forward and upward to a vantage point from which he can poise himself for a leap into creation. The narrative aptly breaks off at this point, but I am free to return to the novel to seek a more complete understanding of this work's significance. My knowledge of Stephen will emerge not only through the shifting play of his immediate consciousness, but through

the shifting narrative structure of the work as well. That knowledge will be modified further by the contemporary response to A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

Applying A Portrait

J. I. M. Stewart remarks that although the form of A Portrait was new and challenging in 1916, "its main substance lay well within the territory of the contemporary English novel."¹⁹ He compares its religious theme to that of Mrs Humphrey Ward's Robert Elsmere, its familial theme to Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh, and its artistic theme to D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers. Yet these similarities do not significantly depreciate the striking originality of A Portrait. My third reading must attempt to bridge the gulf that separates the contemporary conditions of the work's reception from my conditions of reception; in other words, I must not only reconstruct the effect of the work on its early-twentieth-century reader, but must also examine the accumulated effects of the work's strategies and repertoire on me, for my response to some extent has been conditioned by earlier responses. In a general way, I encounter A Portrait in such a manner that my presuppositions regarding the work are defamiliarized, thus creating gaps of indeterminacy which I then resolve to close. To do so I must engage the text in further dialogue, fusing two apparently heterogeneous historical horizons. The ensuing actualization of the work also brings me closer to an historical understanding of the work, one which is founded on the historical significance of the text.

Let me begin by considering the narrative style of A Portrait, constituted as it is by the rhythms of interrupted pulsations. Stewart points out that the style is rich and varied; "vocabulary, syntax,

rhythm are so disposed as to accentuate the contours of the underlying emotion."²⁰ He goes on to remark that these experiments are still within the range of "received" English usage. But what is the effect of these experiments? First, the notably erratic rhythm must have confused Joyce's contemporary audience, accustomed as they might have been to linear progression in a narrative of this sort. Even current readers will be halted by these troublesome leaps in time, place, and tone. Most will be unaffected by the label "stream of consciousness" narrative because they will insist that they don't think like that, just as they insist that words do correspond to objects in external reality. Yet the narrative style that Joyce deploys in A Portrait has influenced many writers since 1916, writers as diverse as Andre Gide, Thomas Pynchon, and Gabriel García Márquez. I infer from my experience of the text that prior attitudes regarding narrative style were too restrictive, and my familiarity with succeeding authors demonstrates that such attitudes must be revised or modified. Otherwise, I will concentrate on the diversity of styles at the expense of an impression of unity, since each of the styles reflects one facet of Stephen, who is a highly unified creation. It appears to me that an important factor in Stephen's development, as it is in everyone's, is his growing awareness of linguistic possibilities. In fact, the entire Portrait can be viewed as an evolution in Stephen's experience of attitudes toward language and its use, thus a movement from correspondence theory to image theory.

The novel begins with the story, couched in nursery terminology, "Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow" At the end of the novel Stephen articulates his desires in the form of an invocation: "Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in

good stead." The cycle is apparently complete; the nursery story yields to the classical myth of the artificer, just as the lisping attempt at a song, "O, the green wothe botheth," yields to the formally perfect villanelle. But between these extremes of language usage much happens which suggests that Stephen's growth as an individual and as an artist is linked to his growing appreciation for the potential of language to formulate such things as are of vital importance--namely, the "reality of experience" and the "uncreated conscience" of the Irish race. Certainly the contemporary audience will respond to the initiation element in this development, but its link to language-awareness seems somehow new and challenging. However, one possible mode of access to this role of language in consciousness-building is the aesthetic theory Stephen articulates in Chapter V. If, as Stephen suggests, art is the human disposition of sensible or intelligible matter for an aesthetic end, and if words are the matter to be disposed, then A Portrait is a manifestation of Stephen's immature, and Joyce's mature, aesthetic theory.

A specific characteristic of art is rhythm. Joyce briefly alludes to it in his Paris Notebook entry dated 25 March, 1903: "Rhythm seems to be the first or formal relation of part to part in any whole or of a whole to its part or parts, or of any part to the whole of which it is a part."²¹ In A Portrait Stephen is more certain in his pronouncement: "Rhythm . . . is the first formal esthetic relation of part to part in any esthetic whole or of an esthetic whole to its part or parts or of any part to the esthetic whole of which it is a part" (p. 206). If I view rhythm as the measured flow of words and phrases, I then infer that it implies a sense of balance, of proportion. Stephen

frequently is aware of the balance in what he says or hears. Upon reciting a "phrase from his treasure," he reflects on his pleasure in "the poise and balance of the period itself." But this reflection gives way to the question, "Did he then love the rhythmic rise and fall of words better than their associations of legend and colour?" (p. 166) His response to this initially rhetorical question is negative, for he goes on to project a vision evoked by associations of legend and color. Similarly, my response is negative, for the novel demonstrates an equilibrium between sensations and language; without this balance Stephen's progress (and Joyce's accomplishment) would not be possible.

I cannot, of course, construe precisely what Joyce's view of language is solely from the evidence of Stephen's aesthetic theory. However, what Joyce accomplishes through the medium of language suggests a great deal, and what he accomplishes is due in part to his original use of rhythm. He establishes a series of relations between part and whole in order to illuminate and emphasize certain themes. As Ryf suggests, "each chapter looks both ahead and back."²² Such a relationship is certainly not unique nor revelatory, and a contemporary audience might not have been so disoriented had Joyce not called attention so continually to the backward and forward movement of the stream of consciousness. In effect, the looking ahead and back of each chapter represents the process by which I both anticipate and recall images and associations from my various readings. As I become conscious of this parallel, I become more aware of the vital relationship among the parts; each part reinforces and complements all the others, and is in turn reinforced by all the others as the various chapters shift from background to foreground and back again. In a very real sense, A Portrait is a

literary Gestalt, an artistic phenomenon whose whole is greater than the sum of its parts. While this concept would not be entirely new to a contemporary audience, the average reader would not necessarily be familiar with the term. As in the case of Flaubert's Madame Bovary, as Jauss points out, a relatively small interpretive community must pass judgment before a work can be accepted into the canon and be read widely.

Quite possibly, Joyce anticipated such a process and thus challenged his audience by degrees, persuading readers to cease looking at words as Stephen is wont to do originally, as linguistic signs which correspond to some physically verifiable phenomenon, and enticing them to open their minds with Stephen to the wealth of associations inherent in the words, thus making them readers capable of appreciating such later works as Ulysses and Finnegans Wake. The novel outlines the process by which this awareness is attained by Stephen Dedalus and, by indirection, by me as well—it narrates a process of initiation for both the protagonist and myself. As an infant and very young boy Stephen responds to sensation and language indiscriminately and immediately, just as I might approach a novel expecting a conventional narrative style. As Stephen enters adolescence, he becomes increasingly sensitive to the various effects of language, just as I become aware of the effects of the various narrative styles. Still, Stephen must move beyond this point; he must create. In a sense, the novel is the realization of this potential, and my understanding and interpretation of the novel constitutes a similar creative act through the shared medium of language.

True application occurs as I confront the work, with its myriad gaps of indeterminacy, in a dialogue of question and answer. In

questioning the interrupted and pulsating narrative rhythm of A Portrait, I become aware of the patterns of counterpoint and juxtaposition in both style and experience. These patterns are not in the text in the sense that they exist independently of me. Rather, I find them because I too have experienced abrupt changes in style or experience in other contexts. Specifically, I may never have experienced a spiritual regeneration as Stephen does in Chapter IV, but I have no doubt had some flash of intuition; I may never have followed such insight with a return to watery dregs of tea, but bathetic plunges are all too frequent to be ignored. In coming to this kind of recognition, I fuse my horizon with that of the work and thus give the work an actuality it did not possess as a mere object of aesthetic perception. The interrupted pulsations are still there, but now they are strategies which do not impede progress, only delay it so that I may reflect on the work's significance.

This actualization now moves toward a realization of meaning in the work. The horizons which fuse represent different stages of historical consciousness, but they do not cancel one another out. Just as Stephen evolves from one stage of language-awareness to the next, so I do not abandon my historical consciousness in a futile attempt to recover James Joyce's historical consciousness. Instead, I see in A Portrait a precursor and complement to my level of historical consciousness, simultaneously recognizing in my consciousness a culmination of that awareness articulated in the work. Part of that awareness relates to language, for now I am in a position to see how crucial language is to the work and to personal experience. Just as Stephen has struggled to escape the narrow, constricting language of correspondence, striving

for a freer association of words and ideas, so I, in my cooperation with the work, have struggled to escape the narrow, confining narrative style, striving for the freer association of language and ideas. The experience is a common one, and for that reason I can accept A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man as my own portrait to a degree.

In Retrospect

As a result of my three readings, my three stages in the hermeneutic enterprise, I have arrived at a fuller understanding of the work and its significance to me. My understanding runs parallel to many critical judgments regarding the work's meaning; Kershner, for example, concludes that the search for the perfect means of expression is reflexive "for, as Joyce realized, it is not finally any particular means of narration which holds the secret of his art, but the changes in narration."²³ We must, I believe, view A Portrait as a portrait which reveals something of the artist in the creative act; as Kershner observes earlier, "the real portrait is the act of painting."²⁴ Certainly we should not identify Stephen and Joyce as interchangeable figures--the novel is not an autobiography. But we cannot ignore the fact that Stephen represents Joyce, and all artists, in his struggles to find the ideal means of expression. And because the novel exists, we can argue that Joyce at least has found that perfect means. In all its variety, its changes, its interrupted pulsations, A Portrait is a coherent, cohesive, unified whole which valorizes the act of creation as a unifying process.

This interpretation is notably hopeful and affirmative, while a popular tendency has been to characterize the work as ironic and therefore negative. I acknowledge that the work possesses ironic moments--

few protagonists have been undercut and implicitly ridiculed as Stephen is by Joyce. However, the overall tone of the work does not impress me as ironic because Stephen, like any aspiring artist, is earnest and intense, despite his pretensions and posturings. Furthermore, to represent the novel as ironic tends to deprecate the act of creation itself, for if we undercut Stephen entirely, don't we dismiss his struggles as somehow empty and objectless, suggesting that there is no ideal means of expression? My presuppositions regarding the creative and interpretive activities (ultimately inseparable) preclude my acceptance of such a position. A Portrait speaks of a movement through stages of language consciousness, and I see my experience reflected in these brushstrokes which represent Stephen's experience. In a sense, the artist, like the God of creation, does not remain aloof, "out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails"; his interest is apparent in the existence of the work.

NOTES

¹ Thomas F. Staley and Bernard Benstock, eds., Approaches to Joyce's Portrait: Ten Essays (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), p. ix.

² See Breon Mitchell, "A Portrait and the Bildungsroman Tradition," in Approaches to Joyce's Portrait, ed. Staley and Benstock, pp. 61-76.

³ R. B. Kershner, Jr., "Time and Language in Joyce's Portrait of the Artist," ELH, 43 (1976), 604-605.

⁴ Matthew Hodgart, James Joyce: A Student's Guide (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 60-61.

⁵ John K. Ryan, trans., The Confessions of Saint Augustine (New York: Image Books, 1960), p. 51.

⁶ Mitchell, pp. 62-63.

⁷ Hodgart, pp. 60-61. Joyce's imitations are most probably conscious, but they do not yet display the imitative mastery of his "Oxen of the Sun" chapter in Ulysses.

⁸ Kershner, 605.

⁹ James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), p. 7. All further references to this work are from this edition and appear parenthetically in the text.

¹⁰ Kershner, 607.

¹¹ Kershner, 609.

¹² Robert S. Ryf, A New Approach to Joyce (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 129.

¹³ Kershner, 612.

¹⁴ Kershner, 614.

¹⁵ For a complete account of Stephen's (and Joyce's) appropriation of Aquinas, see William T. Noon, S.J., Joyce and Aquinas (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), particularly the chapter "A Pennyworth of Thomist Wisdom."

¹⁶ Kershner, 615-616.

¹⁷ Kershner, 617.

¹⁸ Ryf, p. 30.

¹⁹ J. I. M. Stewart, Eight Modern Writers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 444.

²⁰ Stewart, p. 445.

²¹ James Joyce, The Critical Writings, ed. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), p. 145.

²² Ryf, p. 145.

²³ Kershner, 618.

²⁴ Kershner, 618.

AFTERWORD

As I complete this project, this formulation of an ethics of reception, I am tempted to recapitulate my main points, as I so frequently counsel my freshman students to do in their conclusions. However, this is not a freshman essay, and conclusions need not merely restate the controlling idea. Instead, I wish to put into perspective what I have attempted to do in the preceding chapters. The theoretical chapters originated in a set of presuppositions that seem to me common sense--a goal of literary discourse is to enlarge and restructure the experience of the reader; understanding literary discourse is inevitably guided by anticipatory understandings which predispose readers to certain interpretations; one cannot read without interpreting. Just as inevitably, interpretation must occur in conjunction with understanding and application, thus comprising the triad of hermeneutic activity--intelligere, interpretare, and applicare. Complete understanding of a work can exist only if these three activities are engaged. Yet because hermeneutics as a study has split into monist and pluralist perspectives, teachers and practitioners of literary hermeneutics have often become confused about the aims, methods, and limits of interpretation, and their confusion has been translated into the classroom.

This confusion might be dispelled most effectively by adoption of a rational, humanistic pluralism, a pluralism which nevertheless is constrained by limitations embedded in the text itself. I have attempted to justify my pluralist stance by appealing to the essentially humanistic

tendencies I perceive to be rooted in the revisionist hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer, and by showing that phenomenological hermeneutics can address structural as well as thematic matters. The hermeneutic nature of phenomenology--its interest in actualizing meaning through revision and restructuring of a reader's experience--leads quite naturally to reader-response criticism and reception theory. The purpose of this approach is to establish how a text interacts with a reader in an intersubjective dialogue, as well as to determine what the nature of that dialogue might be. These disparate strategies find a common ground in Jauss's aesthetic of reception coupled with his theory of literary hermeneutics. I have adopted his approach, modifying it in certain crucial respects. I have emphasized what I perceive as a latent phenomenological undercurrent, and I have tried to represent more clearly the apparent sources of his theory. However, I have retained his emphasis on the importance of a reader's reception of the work, and how that reception is tempered by historical conditions, both at the time of production and at the time of later reception. The culmination of this examination is my interpretive model, one which draws liberally on Jauss's system of successive stages of reading while also adjusting some of its elements to make it more suitable for general classroom use. I have also adopted Jauss's (and Fish's) practice of formulating an ideal reader, although mine is not a "super-reader" but a composite reader, representing the exchange which should take place between teacher and student, text and reader.

In applying (or allowing my ideal reader to apply) my model to different texts, I have uncovered something of a common denominator. I did not set out to establish this kind of thematic congruence, but its

appearance does support my argument (and Heidegger's, and Fish's, and Jauss's) that the kinds of questions one asks, suggested by the kinds of presuppositions one holds, determine the kinds of answers one receives. In other words, one is predisposed, through anticipatory understanding, to find certain ideas, values, or beliefs expressed in a text. I expect literary works to have a fundamental coherence; not too surprisingly, I find such coherence. I was not altogether prepared for the kind of coherence I discovered, however. Although I have read each of these works many times before, I have never read them with so much attention to their effects on my consciousness. Consequently, it came as something of a revelation to me that each of the works led to a similar actualization of meaning--the aesthetic form, the act of creation itself, provided the consistency and coherence which were often undermined and questioned in the text. No matter how ironic or ambiguous the results of my interpretation might be, in the moment of application I find an affirmation of unity and transcendent meaning. The twentieth-century experience (emblemized in such current critical practices as deconstructionism) generally promotes skepticism and a taste for ambiguity; these works (especially Joyce) so often are cited for their indeterminacy that my critical understanding of them after these readings surprises me. But in this surprise the final effect has been humanistic--my experience has been restructured and enlarged.

Throughout these chapters, particularly the final three, I have been motivated by a desire to outline an approach which will benefit both beginning and advanced students of literature. Currently, such students often lack a sense of historical perspective. Texts are thus perceived by them as artifacts, objects which are understandable and

meaningful only through the performance of some arcane ritual. But if teachers provide them with an historical as well as an aesthetic context, and emphasize the usefulness of natural presuppositions as points of departure, these same students will learn something more valuable than the academic equivalents of jumping through burning hoops--how to define comedy, or how to scan a line of iambic pentameter. They will learn about themselves, how they are participants in the constitution of literary history, and how literature affects their history. Perhaps then we can disprove Hegel's metaphorical condemnation of humanity in history, that the owl of Minerva spreads her wings only with the coming of dusk.

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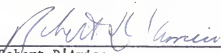
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Michael Eckert was born in 1948 and grew up in the suburbs of Washington, D. C. After a brief interruption for military service, he completed his undergraduate education with a B.S. in English from Frostburg State College in 1974. He moved to Florida in 1978, entering the graduate program in philosophy at the University of Florida. He moved to the English department in 1979 and received his M.A. in 1980. While at the University of Florida, he has taught basic composition skills, argumentative and persuasive writing, and writing about literature. A practitioner of "tweed-jacket criticism," he hopes for a long and satisfying career introducing students to the joys of literature and the challenge of independent thought.

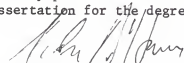
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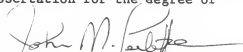
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